TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC DURING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

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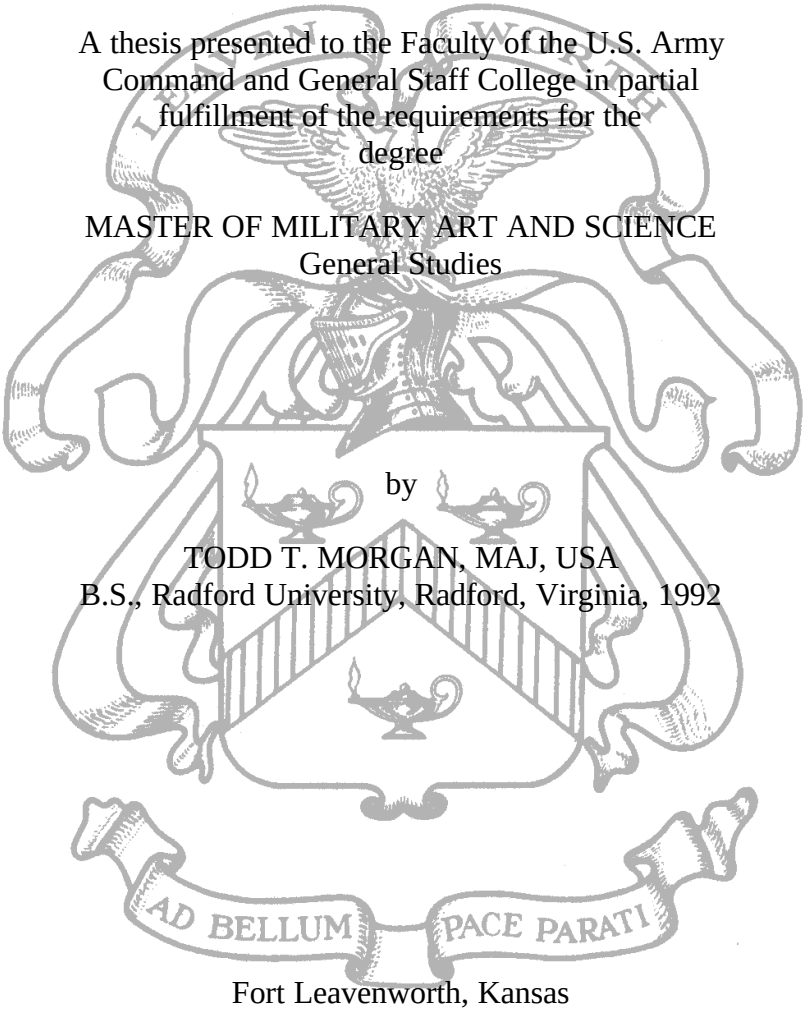

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

TACTICAL INTELLILGENCE IN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC DURING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN, by MAJ Todd T. Morgan, 108 pages.

This study examines how Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant and the Army of the Potomac used tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign. Although Grant did not achieve his operational objective to defeat General Robert E. Lee in the field, tactical intelligence allowed him to continue the operational maneuver of the Army of the Potomac, which later contributed to the eventual defeat of Lee in April of 1865. The examination of tactical intelligence in the Army of the Potomac covers the period of 4 May to 12 June 1864. It encompasses campaign planning and preparation, as well as the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna River, and Cold Harbor. The study combines a general contextual overview of the campaign and battles with a focused discussion and analysis of tactical intelligence collection and use. The study also includes background discussion of influences that contributed to the lack of intelligence functions in the War Department and the Union Army, the intelligence organizations that emerged in the Army of the Potomac, and description of the primary forms and methods of tactical intelligence collection used during the campaign.

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ACRONYMS

BMI	Bureau of Military Information
EPW	Enemy Prisoner of War
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
IPW	Interrogation of a Prisoner of War
OPSEC	Operations Security
OSINT	Open Source Intelligence
R&S	Reconnaissance and Surveillance
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

> From the earliest times, military leaders have always sought information of the enemy, his strengths, his weaknesses, his intentions, his dispositions.[1]
>
> John Keegan, *Intelligence in War*

> The necessity of procuring good intelligence is apparent and need not be further argued.[2]
>
> General George Washington

Introduction

The Overland Campaign lasted approximately forty days and at the end, the troops of the Army of the Potomac were tired but triumphant while General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia remained undefeated. For the Army of the Potomac this was its sixth campaign and the bloodiest month since the start of the war.[3] Horace Porter, then a captain and aide-de-camp on Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's staff wrote:

> From the 4th of May until the end of June there had not been a day in which there was not a battle or skirmish. The record of continuous and desperate fighting had far surpassed any campaign in modern or ancient military history.[4]

The Overland Campaign, which occurred from 4 May to 12 June 1864, was the first part of a series of battles and movements that eventually lead to the defeat of Lee in April of 1865. It stands out from other campaigns of the Civil War because those who fought it received little rest, marched continually in both night and day, conducted night attacks, used little artillery preparation before assaults, and constantly used entrenchments.[5]

When planning the Overland Campaign, both Grant and the Army of the Potomac faced the fact that Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia had not lost a single battle fought in Virginia. Despite his smaller force, Lee had the advantage of interior lines, knew the terrain, and could assume a nearly constant defensive posture with troops that could entrench quickly. Even so, Lieutenant General James Longstreet cautioned an over confident subordinate officer about Grant when he said, "I will tell you that we cannot afford to underrate him and the army he now commands . . . for that man will fight us every day and every hour till the end of this war."[6] Grant, unshaken by Lee's reputation and the Army of the Potomac's mediocre history, commenced the campaign that he hoped would end the war. The battles of the Overland Campaign depleted both soldiers and resources but not the resolve of either side.[7] In the end, Grant proved Longstreet correct.

Intelligence in the Union Army

The US Civil War marked a period of development and implementation for new technology, weapons, concepts and ideas for employment on the battlefield. In *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare*, Colonel T. N. Dupuy described the Civil War as one of the most important conflicts in the 1800 to 1875 period. He added, "many historians have termed the American Civil War the last of the old and the first of the modern wars."[8]

One of the Civil War contributions to modern warfare that did not take root in the US Army until World War I was the function of intelligence. In the history of the US Army before the Civil War, commanders had used various means and methods to collect

intelligence to assist their decision-making. When General George Washington commanded the Continental Army, he served as his own intelligence chief.

Not until after the Civil War had begun did organized and dedicated intelligence functions appear in the Union field armies. The two most noted intelligence organizations both appeared in the Army of the Potomac. Major General George C. McClellan, who organized and served as the Army of the Potomac's first commander, used a hired civilian detective service that proved ineffective. Later, Major General Joseph Hooker commanded the Army of the Potomac and created the Bureau of Military Information (BMI). Organized in the early spring of 1863, the BMI also provided intelligence to Hooker's successor, Major General George Gordon Meade, and continued to do so until the end of the war. In the planning and preparation for the Overland Campaign, the BMI played a pivotal role in aiding Grant to make the decision to cross the Rapidan River on Lee's right in the east. When the campaign began, however, the BMI found itself minimized in its role to provide intelligence to Meade and Grant.

From 4 May to 12 June 1864, Grant and Meade conducted the operational maneuver of the Army of the Potomac and fought the battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna River and Cold Harbor. Though the planning for the campaign involved intelligence at an operational level, once it began the difference between operational and tactical intelligence quickly blurred. The Army of the Potomac used various forms and methods of tactical intelligence throughout the campaign, but each battle ended indecisively with Lee remaining undefeated. These two facts provide the following thesis statement for this study.

Although Grant did not achieve his operational objective to defeat Lee in the field, tactical intelligence allowed Grant and Meade to continue the operational maneuver of the Army of the Potomac, which later contributed to the eventual defeat of Lee in April of 1865. Therefore, how did Grant, Meade, and the Army of the Potomac use tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign?

Defining Intelligence

The question posed is significant because at the outset of the Civil War intelligence was not a formalized function in the Union Army. No techniques, procedures, manuals, or doctrine existed for commanders in the field to reference. Those commanders that created and implemented intelligence functions within their commands did so on their own initiative.

To provide clarity for the thesis, the terms "intelligence" and "information" need defined. Using *Military Intelligence, 1870-1991: A Research Guide*, Jonathan M. House defined intelligence as "the product of systematic efforts to collect, confirm, evaluate, and correlate information from a variety of sources."[9] House defined information with the following: "Information is . . . unevaluated reports of every description. [R]arely if ever does a single source or single piece of information provide perfect intelligence."[10]

During the Civil War, the word intelligence did not have today's meaning and its use described or referred to new information on any subject. It is interesting to note that during the Revolutionary War, General George Washington's definition of intelligence closely resembled today's meaning. The reason for the disparity in terminology at the time of the Civil War is unknown. Additionally, no name or description existed for the combined efforts of intelligence activities. The title "secret service" came closest in

reference to what we describe today as an intelligence unit or organization.[11] During the Civil War, secret service generally referred to non-military related detective work, but with the advent of the BMI, it also included that organization within the Army of the Potomac.

Thesis Methodology

The presentation, discussion, and analysis of tactical intelligence in the Army of the Potomac covers the period of 4 May to 12 June 1864 during the Overland Campaign. The primary focus concerning the use of tactical intelligence is on Grant, and to a lesser extent Meade. The choice of the Overland Campaign for an examination of tactical intelligence provides a succinct period, characterized by maneuver, which has an appropriate breadth of events and actions from which to discuss and analyze its use.

In order to examine the use of tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign, the thesis provides a background discussion of what influenced the Union Army and why intelligence operations was not a developed function. Included is a brief discussion on the two intelligence organizations that emerged in the Army of the Potomac at different times before the Overland Campaign. This provides context for understanding how the Army of the Potomac grappled with creating its own intelligence functions without guidance or example from the War Department. Additionally, the thesis gives a description and discussion of the primary forms and methods of intelligence collection in the Army of the Potomac. This includes an overview of intelligence terms and definitions in relation to the Civil War, which helps prepare for the discussion of tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign.

The preface to the use of tactical intelligence by the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign encompasses a description of the terrain as well as the initial disposition and organization of the opposing armies. A general contextual overview of the campaign and battles, combined with a discussion of the collection and use of intelligence by the Army of the Potomac follows. It starts with planning and preparation for the campaign and ends with Cold Harbor.

The conclusion of the thesis provides an overview of the Overland Campaign's end state in relation to Grant's intended objective. A summary of the forms and methods of tactical intelligence used facilitates the analysis and conclusions drawn, which answers the primary question and concludes the thesis.

General Background

As of January 1861, the Regular Army had an authorized strength of 18,000 with an actual strength of 1,098 officers and 15,304 enlisted that totaled an overall strength of 16,402. Approximately one third of the southern born officer corps resigned their commissions and joined the Confederacy. Upon the decision to respond to the rebellion militarily, the recruitment of volunteers began and the Union Army formed. Instead of becoming a cadre, the Regular Army units integrated with the volunteer force of the Union Army.

Because the US Army conducted either frontier duty or coastal defense along the Atlantic, it entered the Civil War unprepared in many ways. It lacked a sizable force, an adequate system of command and control, as well as any intelligence functions in the War Department or in the field armies. Though the latter of these inadequacies persisted, the Union Army entered the war after several months of preparation.

The initial strategy of the Union Army developed terrain-oriented operational objectives that specifically focused on key southern cities such as Richmond, Virginia, the capitol of the Confederacy. Despite the desire to quickly end the rebellion and restore the Union through use of the North's manpower and resources, an end state many northerners thought simple, the Confederacy thwarted any quick conclusion to the situation.

The defense-based strategy of the Confederacy, combined with the will of protecting the homeland and a way of life, negated the Union's attempt for speedy success. As a result, the war became protracted and two major theaters of operations evolved, western and eastern. In the east, Virginia was a significant area of Confederate operations and became the predominate battleground of the Civil War, which included the Overland Campaign.

Army of the Potomac

The *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* states, "during the winter of 1861-62, the Army of the Potomac was built."[12] McClellan was the first of six commanders through 1865. During the first two years of its existence, the Army of the Potomac endured bloody fighting, heavy losses, and a steady succession of commanders. When Lee began the second Confederate invasion of the North in June of 1863, Meade relieved Hooker from command of the Army of the Potomac on 28 June on orders from President Lincoln. Up to this time, the Army of the Potomac had not known success. Within days of his appointment, Meade led the Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg, defeating Lee in July of 1863. Though not defeated on the battlefield, the

Army of the Potomac did not see tactical or strategic victory again until Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House in April of 1865.

Grant's Strategy

On 9 March 1864, Lincoln appointed Grant as General in Chief of the Union Army. Grant, working with Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, had begun revision of the overall Union strategy and developed a concept of attack based on operational raids to destroy Confederate resources. This changed the Union strategy from one that was terrain-oriented to force-oriented.

In his memoirs, Grant stated, "my general plan now was to concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field."[13] He intended to accomplish this by launching multiple and near simultaneous attacks against and throughout the Confederacy. The decisive operation for the Union Army was to defeat Lee and then seize Richmond. The shaping operation was for Sherman to defeat the Confederate forces defending near Atlanta while all other attacks served as supporting efforts.

The intent of Grant's strategy was to apply continuous pressure on the Confederate armies to prevent them from reinforcing one another. For the Army of the Potomac, Grant wanted Meade to engage and maintain contact with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The primary purpose was to defeat Lee outside of Richmond while preventing him from reinforcing the Confederate forces that protected Atlanta from Sherman's attack.[14] Major General Benjamin F. Butler and Major General Franz Sigel commanded the supporting efforts for the Army of the Potomac. Butler's Army of the James attacked toward Richmond and Petersburg while Sigel's force attacked south down the Shenandoah Valley.

Grant wanted the east-west coordinated Union campaign to be a "fight to the finish."[15] He placed Sherman in charge of all Union forces in the western theater for the attack eastward through Georgia to destroy Confederate resources. In the east, Grant positioned himself with Meade and the Army of the Potomac with his operational objective to defeat Lee north of Richmond.

In his memoirs, Grant described Richmond as "fortified and entrenched so perfectly that one man inside to defend was more than equal to five outside besieging or assaulting."[16] In a telegram to Grant about reinforcements during the Overland Campaign, the Union Army Chief of Staff, Major General Henry W. Halleck reiterated the campaign's end state.

> In my opinion, every man we can collect should be hurled against Lee, wherever he may be, as his army, not Richmond, is the true objective point of this campaign. When that army is broken, Richmond will be of very little value to the enemy.[17]

In early May 1864, Grant initiated the overall Union Army campaign to defeat the Confederacy. Sherman, with 100,000 troops attacked towards Atlanta. Grant accompanied Meade and the Army of the Potomac with 118,000 troops and moved south across the Rapidan River and into the Wilderness. By the campaign's end, the Army of the Potomac incurred approximately 60,000 casualties, which exceeded the total number of troops that remained in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.[18]

Though each of the four significant battles of the Overland Campaign ended indecisively, with Lee undefeated, Grant achieved success through his ability to maintain the initiative through maneuver. Tactical intelligence contributed to this success, as did the skill and ability of some of Meade's corps commanders. Unfortunately, neither Grant nor Meade had the advantage of any intelligence provided from the War Department. The

following chapter discusses the reasons why intelligence functions did not exist in the Union Army, and the methods of tactical intelligence used by the Army of the Potomac.

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[1]John Keegan, *Intelligence in War; Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Random House, Inc., 2003), 7.

[2]Ibid.

[3]John Whiteclay Chambers II, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 133.

[4]Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: Century, 1897; reprint, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 231 (page citation is to the reprinted edition).

[5]J. H. Anderson, *Grant's Campaign in Virginia; May 1-June 30, 1864* (London, England: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1908), 100.

[6]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 47.

[7]Ibid., 39-40.

[8]T. N. Dupuy, Colonel, US Army, Retired, *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1980), 195, 196.

[9]Jonathan M. House, *Military Intelligence, 1870-1991: A Research Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 2.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Edwin C. Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union; The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 8.

[12]Lieutenant Colonel Marvin A. Kriedberg, Infantry, US Army, and First Lieutenant Merton G. Henry, AGC, US Army. Department of the Army, Pamphlet 20-212, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army*, *1775-1945* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1955), 121.

[13]Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Charles L. Webster and Co., 1885; reprint, New York: The Great Commanders Collection, 1994), 365-368 (page citations are to the reprinted addition).

[14]Archer Jones, *Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 192.

[15]James I. Robertson, *The Civil War* (Washington, DC: US Civil War Centennial Commission, US Government Printing Office, 1963), 17-26.

[16]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 371-372.

[17]US War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies,* Part 3-Correspondence, Etc., 1st ser., vol. 36 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 114.

[18]Robertson, *The Civil War*, 26-27.

CHAPTER 2

THE ABSENCE OF UNION ARMY INTELLIGENCE FUNCTIONS AND ARMY OF THE POTOMAC TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION DURING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

> If intelligence can predict where an enemy will attack, a commander can then deploy forces more effectively.[1]
>
> *The Reader's Companion to Military History*

> Many intelligence reports in war are contradictory, even more are false, and most are uncertain.[2]
>
> Clausewitz

Introduction

Before discussing how the Army of the Potomac conducted and applied tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign, it is necessary to establish a background. This chapter provides a discussion of what influenced the Union Army staff system and why intelligence operations were not then staff functions. Also included is an overview of the two intelligence organizations that emerged in the Army of the Potomac; the one established by McClellan, and the other that Hooker created, which survived for the remainder of the Civil War. The other area of emphasis focuses on the primary methods of intelligence collection and use. It includes intelligence terms and definitions in relation to the Civil War as well as a discussion about the methods of collection used. It is important to note that though this discussion uses current terminology, these terms did not exist during the Civil War. The intent is to provide a contextual frame of reference with no attempt to compare the methods of intelligence collection used by the Army of the Potomac with those used by the US Army today.

Union Army Intelligence Background

The US Army staff organization in the first half of the nineteenth century did not include intelligence as a function. At the outset of the Civil War, the US possessed a standing Army of less than 17,000 with minimal staff above the regimental level that was unprepared to perform battlefield duties, including intelligence. Furthermore, in 1861, both the Union Government and the Army lacked an established system and contingency for intelligence collection. The 1861 *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States* neither prescribed nor referenced intelligence organizations.[3] The result was that neither intelligence functions nor organizations would emerge as a standardized and integrated bureau in the War Department or Union Army Headquarters during the Civil War. Despite the lack of any headquarters guidance, McClellan, and later Hooker, both created intelligence organizations out of need.

The Nineteenth Century Army

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the small Regular Army set a precedent of temporary expansion, using volunteers, for the War of 1812 and later in the Mexican War of 1846-1848. Otherwise, the US faced no significant external threat. The small Army staffs focused on administering a frontier constabulary with little need to establish and maintain any intelligence capability.[4]

With a reliance on European military expertise that dated back to the Revolutionary War,[5] the US Army observed the military developments and wars in Europe. The staffs in many European armies continued to grow and evolve, which included the introduction of intelligence functions, but the US Army ignored these examples.[6]

Influential Thought

The predominate influences on the US Army during the nineteenth century were the French and the idea of "Napoleonic Tradition," as well as the pursuit of universal principles, which became the basis for US Army military theory and doctrine. The United States Military Academy at West Point incorporated the maxims of Napoleon and the strategic writings of Antoine Henri Jomini, Napoleon's exponent, into the curriculum. This was due to the influence of Dennis Hart Mahan, who began teaching at West Point in 1824.[7] As a result, several generations of Army officers applied these ideals and theories throughout the mid-1800s, some of whom would eventually fight the Civil War.[8]

To understand how this affected the US Army and why intelligence did not emerge as a distinct staff function, a quick review of Jomini is required. In his writings, Jomini described a general staff comprised of officers educated in various military theories and practices, which did not include intelligence, and remained uninvolved in strategy and tactics.[9] Furthermore, Jomini's *The Art of War* devoted chapter 6 to a discussion of staff functions, including a separate section that addressed intelligence collection and its application. However, these are indeed separate and unlinked discussions and do not suggest the creation or use of a specifically dedicated intelligence staff or organization.[10]

Another work that contributed to the reason why no intelligence organizations or functions evolved in the Amy staff system is Major General Henry W. Halleck's book, *Elements of Military Art and Science*, compiled in 1846. This book, which became the basis for Civil War strategic and operational thought as well as staff use, exemplified the nineteenth-century West Point graduate.[11] However, Halleck varied from Jomini in that

he separated staff functions from logistics when he acknowledged that the US Army staff system "is exceedingly defective, and entirely unsuited to the object for which it is created," and that it required "a new and different organization." [12] However, he offered no solutions and neither discussed the collection nor the application of intelligence anywhere in the US Army.

Staff Officers

The period of 1830 to1850 marked a dramatic increase in the number of Regular Army officers assigned as permanent staff officers who specialized in logistics support or technical services. Due to an increased variety of functions, the size of the staffs in the Army increased, but intelligence functions remained absent. [13]

When commissioned as a permanent staff officer, officers received training in their specialized areas. Combat arms officers could also receive temporary assignment as detailed staff officers. Regardless, neither permanent nor detailed staff officers performed intelligence related functions. [14]

The officers that performed tasks that most closely resembled intelligence belonged to the Corps of Engineers. Though combined during the Civil War, officers in the Corps of Topographical Engineers and the Corps of Engineers performed or accompanied reconnaissance as part of their regular duties. Their other responsibilities, which also contributed to battlefield intelligence, included the production of maps and sketches as well as the identification of assault and defensive positions. Even so, they were not intelligence officers, nor did their commanders treat them as such. [15]

First Lieutenant William P. Craighill, an 1853 West Point graduate and a Union Corps of Engineers officer attempted to bridge some of the gaps between the published

regulations and practical application in the field. He published *The 1862 Army Officer's Pocket Companion, A Manual for Staff Officers in the Field* while he served as an assistant professor of engineering at West Point in 1861. His *Pocket Companion*, written in three parts, reviewed the existing French staff corps, discussed a selection of the 1861 Union Army laws and regulations, and then provided his own analysis, guidance, and recommendations.[16]

Craighill provided an excellent discussion of reconnaissance, but he never specifically addressed intelligence. The closest he came to describing an officer with intelligence related duties, aside from engineers, was a commanding general's aide de camp. However, he only stated they should have a basic grasp of the enemy situation and disposition.[17] Craighill probably omitted any discussion of intelligence because it remained a function of command. Even so, an expectation existed that any professional officer could perform the intelligence functions required.[18]

The General in Chief, 1862

When Major General Henry W. Halleck became General in Chief of the Union Army in July of 1862, neither his staff nor that of the War Department possessed any specifically designated intelligence sections or officers.[19] Halleck, however, had a reputation that emphasized intelligence as the commander of the Department of Missouri. As General in Chief he provided his own personal analysis to intelligence reports bound for the field, but nothing more. As a result, the Union Army would never create a dedicated intelligence department, bureau, or officer with such duties in its headquarters in Washington, DC.[20]

With no higher headquarters example, and no instructional or doctrinal publications, Union commanders in the field created their own intelligence staffs. They generally delegated the function of intelligence to a member of their headquarters staff or a subordinate commander.[21] Most Union commanders, however, remained involved at some level and became a part of the process for better or worse.

The Birth of Union Army Intelligence

The Union Army's first intelligence organization emerged in the Army of the Potomac in 1862. McClellan hired the civilian Allen Pinkerton and his National Detective Agency to determine Confederate troop strength and unit identification. Pinkerton, however, only managed to exacerbate McClellan's already slow and deliberate manner of command when he provided inflated estimates. He also lacked the ability to understand and analyze the combined information provided by his own detectives with that provided by the Army of the Potomac and produced little intelligence of any value. Upon McClellan's removal from command, Pinkerton and his detective agency left too.[22]

Interim Intelligence in the Army of the Potomac

Major General Ambrose E. Burnside Commanded the Army of the Potomac after McClellan. Major General Alfred Pleasanton, who had served as McClellan's cavalry chief, assumed responsibility for intelligence in Pinkerton's place. However, Pleasanton provided equally wrong, misleading, or exaggerated intelligence.[23]

John C. Babcock, the only soldier who had worked for Pinkerton, was now a civilian and remained with the Army of the Potomac. Burnside knew Babcock from before the war and offered him the post as head of intelligence for the Army of the Potomac. After he accepted, Burnside asked him to produce a report on the condition of

the secret-service department in the Army of the Potomac. Unfortunately, both McClellan and Pinkerton had taken all their intelligence related files so they could write their final reports. To fill this void, Babcock visited the Department of Washington to make copies of the reports kept on file.[24]

As the one person who performed intelligence functions in the Army of the Potomac under Burnside, Babcock managed to generate Confederate order of battle charts from the copied information. Despite this, and his efforts to provide intelligence advice, Burnside either ignored or disregarded it. After the failure of the Fredericksburg Campaign in December 1862, Hooker replaced Burnside as the Commander of the Army of the Potomac in early 1863.

The Bureau of Military Information

As Hooker settled in to command of the Army of the Potomac, he directed his Provost Marshal General, Brigadier General Marsena R. Patrick, to create an organization with a developed system to collect and receive intelligence. With this guidance, Patrick started the process to find someone to head this organization. In his 10 February 1863 diary entry he wrote,

> I have made some arrangements about [the] secret service department--Have had a long conversation with Col. [George] Sharp[e] of the 120' N.Y. as to the organization of the Dept. with him, a lawyer, for its Chief.[25]

The next day Sharpe agreed to take the position and reported for duty as the Deputy Provost Marshal for the Army of the Potomac.

Sharpe quickly began to build his intelligence organization. In addition to Babcock, he recruited Captain John McEntee as one of his principle assistants. Sharpe's organization continued to grow and included more officers as well as noncommissioned

officers and civilians. He listed many of them as "guides" for pay purposes, though he referred to them as "scouts" because their primary duties involved reconnaissance.

Initially, Sharpe called his organization the secret service department. Soon, however, the title "BMI" began to appear on Sharpe's intelligence reports. These included information the BMI collected through prisoner interrogation and scouting, which he melded with information collected by the cavalry, balloon surveillance, signal station observation and intercepted Confederate messages, as well as newspapers and reports from subordinate and adjacent units.[26]

Sharpe's BMI differed from Pinkerton's activities because it had the ability to sort out and synthesize the variety of information and intelligence it collected and received. In modern terms, Sharpe had created an all-source intelligence organization that could produce a comprehensive picture of the enemy situation, which included the order of battle charts created by Babcock, and then disseminated it to the Army of the Potomac's corps commanders. As long as the BMI had adequate input and sources, it performed well. Despite this revolution in intelligence capability, Hooker both disregarded and ignored the products of the organization created from his own guidance.

In mid-June of 1863, Patrick made two entries in his diary, one on the 17th and one on the 19th, which not only characterized the BMI's ability, but Hooker's disregard.

> He has treated our "Secret Service Department[,]" which has furnished him with the most astonishingly correct information with indifference at first, and now with insult. . . .
>
> We get accurate information, but Hooker will not use it and insults all who differ from him in opinion.[27]

After the failure of the Chancellorsville Campaign and shortly before Gettysburg, Major General George Gordon Meade replaced Hooker as Commander of the Army of the Potomac and inherited the BMI.

Meade took an opposite approach to the BMI and became personally involved with the collection and receipt of intelligence. He assumed the role of all-source analysis that Sharpe had fulfilled and used the BMI more like a separate intelligence unit instead. This usurped Sharpe's analytical role and relegated him to reporting only what the BMI collected. The BMI's ability remained minimized for the majority of Meade's command, which included the Overland Campaign in 1864.

Introduction to the Forms and Methods of Union Army Intelligence

The following is a discussion on the forms and methods of intelligence collection found in the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. The methods and techniques discussed do not encompass all that the Union Army used during the Civil War, such as balloons, partisans, and telegraph tapping. Before entering into this discussion, it is necessary to cover and define the applicable terminology.

Relevant Terms and Definitions

With consideration to the distinction between information and intelligence, there is also a difference between military intelligence and combat information. Combat information is unevaluated information about the enemy gained during the course of battle provided to the commander for immediate use. Military intelligence focuses on the enemy's capabilities, intentions, vulnerabilities, and the environment. Despite this difference, both had and continue to have relevancy to the immediate fight on the battlefield. It is important to note, however, that definitions and distinctions of this sort

did not exist during the Civil War. The following definitions for the forms of intelligence used by the Army of the Potomac are in context with the Civil War, and do not fully depict their modern understanding.

Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) involved the interception and decryption of enemy flag communications. Human intelligence, called HUMINT, encompassed the largest and most diverse form of intelligence that included a variety of methods. The most common methods used soldiers in combat, reconnaissance, surveillance, captured documents, and enemy prisoners of war (EPWs). Of these methods, reconnaissance became the most relied upon, which commanders could readily employ.

Cavalry, scouts, and soldiers comprised the most common reconnaissance assets. They conducted physical observation, also known as surveillance, which could provide critical and exact details on the enemy or an area. In addition to this "eyes on" method of intelligence collection, potential intelligence also happened publicly and in the open.

Open source intelligence (OSINT) included the use of public or "open" information such as newspapers and other readily available publications. Though seldom a singular source of intelligence, it helped fill knowledge gaps or established context for other pieces of intelligence.

Individually or collectively, these forms of information and intelligence required analysis. Analysis, then and now, involved the fusion of these different pieces of information and intelligence into one assessment that contributed to an overall picture of the enemy.[28] As a result, either planning or action occurred as directed by the commander.

Tactical Intelligence

Union commanders in the field occasionally received strategic intelligence from the War Department, but they relied heavily upon their own tactical intelligence. Tactical intelligence, produced at the soldier and unit level, served as the primary type of intelligence during the Overland Campaign. It attempted to identify and verify information and intelligence about the enemy and used both single and multiple forms and methods that could establish an overall picture and assessment. Based on accumulated wartime experience, Captain August V. Kautz published *The 1865 Customs of the Service for Officers of the Army* and wrote

> So much depends on the proper conduct of the espionage [intelligence], that without a capacity or sufficient attention on the part of the Commander himself to the subject, all his operations will be nothing more than "guess work".[29]

However, two key factors, terrain and maps, affected the ability of Union commanders to conduct operations and collect tactical intelligence.

Terrain and Maps

Terrain influenced both maneuver and tactical intelligence collection for the Union Army and the Army of the Potomac. Though some commanders understood the value of terrain analysis, many did not. This often resulted in poor unit synchronization and battlefield tactics, which also hindered intelligence collection. For both sides, terrain supported operations security (OPSEC) since it deterred surveillance and allowed commanders to mask their movements. Conversely, it made the enemy difficult to find and they often moved unobserved and unnoticed days at a time.[30] In addition to terrain, the procurement of accurate maps also challenged Union commanders, especially Grant and Meade during the Overland Campaign.[31]

The Federal Government, the US Navy, and the US Army each had their own small topographic organizations, but no centralized US national mapping agency existed to create maps before the Civil War. Not since 1792 had the eastern US been mapped, and the 1804 Lewis and Clark expedition represented the last significant effort to map any portion of the US before the Civil War. Therefore, the maps on hand had outdated information and locally produced maps rarely provided the detail for military operations and did not adjoin.[32] McClellan, who suffered from "the want of precise topographical information,"[33] made efforts to map Virginia while he commanded the Army of the Potomac, which helped his successors. Unfortunately for Grant and Meade, McClellan's efforts only encompassed a portion of the Overland Campaign area of operations.

Forms and Methods of Union Army Intelligence Collection

HUMINT, SIGINT, and OSINT all provided tactical benefit to the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. The primary methods of HUMINT collection, the most prevalent form of intelligence on the Civil War battlefield, were reconnaissance, surveillance, the interrogation of prisoners, and captured documents. SIGINT, a new method of intelligence gathering on the battlefield, also yielded information on the enemy that either confirmed other reports or triggered a collection effort. OSINT served as another source of information on the enemy, but seldom provided accurate or detailed intelligence that significantly contributed to the Overland Campaign or any other Union campaign. Another source of intelligence came from the Union Navy when it provided Union Army commanders' tactical intelligence on Confederate coastal and river defenses.[34] They also reported any observed Confederate troop movements when they patrolled up and down the rivers and inland waterways.[35]

Reconnaissance and Patrols

Reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) proved the most frequently used method of HUMINT by the Union Army and the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. This included mounted and dismounted reconnaissance, which happened on the move or while stationary. In the Union Army, reconnaissance and patrols were two different functions, but they varied only slightly, and one usually encompassed the other. Though patrols primarily focused on local security, they were also included in the category of reconnaissance.

According to Craighill's *Pocket Companion*, which elaborated on the information found in the *1861 Revised Regulations*, nine different types of reconnaissance existed. [36] Of these nine, the two predominately used by the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign were the use of scouts and flankers during movement, and offensive reconnaissance. Though Craighill named nine different types of reconnaissance, the tactics, techniques, and procedures he described remained generally consistent for each.

All patrols, regardless of purpose, attempted to avoid contact with the enemy unless specifically designated as an offensive patrol. Though patrols used movement security techniques, they stayed close enough to the main body unit for support if needed.[37]

March column movements used scouts and flankers, which equated to pickets that moved ahead as an advanced guard, as well as on the flanks and at the rear of the column.[38] They also provided security as the column passed through road junctions and intersections and used their immediate chain of command to send reports.[39]

The practice of reconnaissance, in general, attempted to gain knowledge on a few or several items of interest. This included terrain, road distances and conditions as well as route verification and any key considerations along the way. More often, however, reconnaissance attempted to determine the enemy's location and strength, actual or deception positions, avenues of approach, attack positions as well as possible directions of attack. Reconnaissance elements, often accompanied by engineer officers, returned with sketches and reports that included physical descriptions, statistical data, as well as any communication and military considerations.[40]

Offensive reconnaissance, frequently used during the Overland Campaign, gathered intelligence, but often turned into a combat action that preceded a main attack or became a deception operation. Offensive reconnaissance emphasized the collection of detailed information on the enemy's defenses and their arrayal. Furthermore, offensive reconnaissance diverged from the other types because the reconnoitering element consisted of larger elements, such as a regiment or brigade, and used a technique that equated to a movement to contact. Commanders used offensive reconnaissance to locate the enemy by drawing their fire, which exposed their position and helped identify its extent. The cavalry, sometimes used in this role during the Overland Campaign, provided the commander with a reconnaissance capability that ranged farther than soldiers on foot.

Union cavalry, compared to Confederate cavalry, was better equipped but poorly trained. Cavalry reconnaissance, already practiced against the American Indians on the frontier, served as another method of intelligence collection. However, Union commanders frequently used their cavalry to conduct raids and combat instead, a practice used for most of the Overland Campaign.[41] Though this mind-set eventually changed,

cavalry reconnaissance alone did not guarantee battlefield success, but as with other intelligence collection, it could help prevent failure if properly used.

Furthermore, Union commanders had to learn that extensive cavalry raids followed by R&S missions quickly wore down both men and horses.[42] The major contributors to the problem of cavalry use resided in organization and doctrine. Though the Union cavalry underwent reorganization in mid-1863,[43] doctrine and a resistance to change persisted. Ultimately, the effectiveness of cavalry as a method of R&S varied based on two factors, the immediate cavalry commander and the higher commander.[44]

Scouts and Spies

During the Civil War, the terms "scouts" and "spies" were often interchangeable in the field while at other times they were distinctly different. Hooker called a spy a spy. However, some spies preferred the name scout. Spies, and some scouts, were usually civilians employed by a Union field commander. Because language and appearance were of no issue, spies and civilian scouts had the ability to blend in.

Spies tended to work in urban and populated areas while scouts performed their missions in the countryside and worked independently or augmented reconnaissance patrols. Scouts had the ability to tap into Union sympathizers who could also provide information. Though Sharpe had limited access to information from both spies and civilian scouts during the Overland Campaign, they did not significantly contribute to the overall intelligence effort for the Army of the Potomac.[45] He derived the majority of his intelligence from the BMI's scouts and EPW interrogation.[46]

Interrogation of Prisoners and Deserters

The interrogation of enemy prisoners of war, called IPW today, was another form of Union Army HUMINT. IPW produced the most reports when compared to the other intelligence forms and methods used during the Civil War. Deserters, who were more willing to talk, also provided information that was generally more useful. Refugees were another source of information that usually had less intelligence value about the enemy but could provide details about the surrounding area. Runaway slaves, also known as "contrabands," often proved valuable as sources of intelligence, especially if they had been the servants of a Confederate officer.[47]

However, the potential to collect and produce intelligence of value depended on the effectiveness of the IPW system used. McClellan produced a special circular and established a specific order that ensured interrogations were "thorough and coordinated."[48] Later, the BMI had an established process that collected, analyzed, and disseminated intelligence gained through interrogations and interviews. During the Overland Campaign, corps and division commanders conducted their own IPW and passed their reports to Meade's headquarters.[49] However, the potential to receive misinformation deliberately provided or because the individual had an impaired capacity, always existed.

The Union Signal Corps as Intelligence Collectors

The Union's signal corps emerged as a valuable intelligence asset during the Civil War. Signal corps units accomplished their primary mission when they passed messages with flags and torches from elevated terrain, which placed them in a position to observe the enemy with their telescopes. When Union commanders realized this, they used their

signal stations, with the built-in ability to communicate, to observe, and report on enemy movements.[50] Union commanders often abandoned the signal stations primary communications duty and used them only for surveillance. Furthermore, when terrain proved unfeasible for the establishment of signal stations, commanders used their signal soldiers as a reconnaissance asset, a practice used for much of the Overland Campaign.[51]

The Union Army's use of the signal corps as a surveillance asset was only one of two means that collected information on the enemy. Union signal stations also intercepted enemy flag communications, which introduced SIGINT to the Civil War. SIGINT emerged as an important and valuable source of intelligence, but it produced limited results. Due to the terrain over which the Overland Campaign occurred, SIGINT produced minimal intelligence.[52]

To counter the Confederate interception of Union flag signals, Major Alfred Myer created and introduced his cipher disk in 1863. Even though this enabled Union signal stations to pass encoded messages, the Myer's Disk received little use for fear that it might be captured or lost to the enemy in some way.[53] The Confederates employed a similar system, which Union signal soldiers easily broke and deciphered their messages.[54] The first indication that the Confederates knew the Army of the Potomac had advanced south of the Rapidan River resulted from an intercepted and deciphered message.

OSINT

Captured and intercepted letters or written messages, as well as newspapers, fell in the category of OSINT, which provided another from of intelligence in the Civil War and the Overland Campaign.[55] Newspapers served as the primary form of OSINT since the uncensored press printed significant amounts of military information through the

"imbedded journalists" that accompanied units of both sides during campaigns and battles. Most newspapers dedicated a portion of their content to war correspondence and furnished unit designations, commander's names, troop strengths, and movement plans, as well as after action reviews with maps, and estimated casualties.

In the field, Union and Confederate pickets and headquarters made it a practice to trade newspapers. The Union Army, which willingly participated in newspaper exchanges, was the most vulnerable to OSINT collection by the Confederates. As an intelligence source for the Union, fewer Confederate newspapers existed to exploit and Southern editors did a better job at censorship, which they willingly supported. Though newspapers remained a source of intelligence, commanders on both sides quickly learned that not all reporters printed accurate stories, or they lacked the detail to be of intelligence value.[56] Regardless, during the Overland Campaign, Grant frequently read the Richmond newspaper to see what the Confederates reported about his efforts.[57]

Operations Security

Union commanders understood they had to protect against Confederate OSINT collection and surveillance. Their considerations included spies, locals, and what Union newspapers printed. Several Union commanders tried to stop the trading of newspapers between the lines and endeavored to limit what reporters printed, even though they claimed "freedom of the press."[58] Operations security considerations also included physical measures. During the Overland Campaign, the Army of the Potomac used terrain, vegetation, and darkness to mask its movements on several occasions.

Deception

A counter to intelligence collection was the practice of deception, which intended to mislead the enemy about the true nature of a unit's disposition. Both sides practiced deception during the Civil War, but no matter how skillfully employed, it only worked a short while. In March of 1864, as Grant became General in Chief, Lee told Longstreet, "It behooves us to be on alert, or we will be deceived. You know that is part of Grant's tactics."[59]

Though the *1861 Revised Regulations* discussed the use of deception camps, and both sides employed other visual forms of deception such as straw men and logs to replicate artillery, the Army of the Potomac did not use any of these methods. Instead, they used infantry and cavalry maneuver to deceive Lee's army as they shifted forces along their lines or when they displaced to by-pass Lee's right flank. Though these ruses sometimes worked well, they only provided a short-lived benefit.

Intelligence Analysis

The analysis of collected information and intelligence focused on not only trying to understand what it meant, but also attempted to verify other reports, especially those produced by only one method. The analytical process had several factors, regardless of who conducted it. This included personal knowledge about the opposing Confederate commander, the age of the information or intelligence, the manner collected, and the experience of the individual that conducted the analysis.

After the Civil War, Major General Emory Upton, who had commanded a brigade in the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign, wrote,

> With no exact knowledge of the enemy's whereabouts, let us see what benefit the country might possibly have derived from having a few competent staff officers at

> Army headquarters. Map in hand, each eager to penetrate the enemy's decisions and to suggest the means of circumventing him.[60]

This statement not only identifies that analysis problems existed, but shows how the lack of an organized and dedicated intelligence staff or organization exacerbated the problem. Kautz suggested that analysis, or "genius" as he called it, was a characteristic of the great generals of the past who used only a little information to achieve success. Kautz further suggested that if a commanding general did not possess the genius (ability to analyze intelligence) then he had to find someone within his command that did. Ultimately, intelligence analysis depended on each commander's individual insight and experience.

Dissemination of Intelligence

Initially, the methods of information dissemination in the Union Army varied little from those of the two previous centuries until it implemented the semaphore system and adopted the civilian telegraph for military purposes. Even with these innovations, Union reconnaissance elements still passed intelligence the same way the Roman Army did; dispatches carried by foot and horse. When the telegraph emerged on the battlefield in the Union Army, at first, it only provided communications between Washington, DC and the field, but this changed.

By the Overland Campaign Meade and Grant communicated with the corps commanders, who in turn communicated with their division commanders by telegraph. However, this method only worked during the static battles in a campaign characterized by a series of march maneuvers. Nevertheless, when used, the telegraph greatly assisted in the flow and dissemination of information. Couriers still existed as a relied upon means to communicate on the battlefield, despite the possibility of their getting killed, captured, or losing their way.

Conclusion

The lack of a formalized intelligence function at any level in the Union Army pre-dated the Civil War. Though staffs increased in size, intelligence remained absent in both the War Department and the Union Army headquarters, which left field commanders without guidance. Furthermore, no doctrinal or instructional references existed for commanders to use concerning intelligence collection and organizations.

When combined, the *1861 Revised Regulations* and Craighill's *Pocket Companion* provided excellent tactics, techniques and procedures for reconnaissance and the methods used for reporting. Craighill probably placed an emphasis on reconnaissance because he was an engineer officer. It is curious to note, however, that he made no mention of any of the methods used by Major Robert Rogers and his colonial rangers during the French and Indian War, which wholly applied to the practice of reconnaissance.

Out of necessity, commanders such as McClellan and Hooker had to establish their own intelligence organizations and functions. As the Civil War progressed, so too did the use and application of intelligence, which included the improved capability to collect it.

Union commanders, including Grant and Meade during the Overland Campaign, had a variety of methods at their disposal to collect intelligence. The lack of formalized and standardized intelligence functions hampered intelligence collection. A few notable exceptions emerged, such as the BMI under Sharpe, which developed into an organization that conducted all-source intelligence. Even so, Hooker, who had directed

the creation of the BMI, ignored its efforts. Later, Meade and Grant hardly used the BMI during the Overland Campaign.[61]

HUMINT, SIGINT, and OSINT emerged as the three most prevalent forms of intelligence used by the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. The various methods of HUMINT produced the most intelligence, specifically reconnaissance and IPW. Both provided Union commanders with the most readily available intelligence. This is probably true because neither encompassed any technical aspects. Furthermore, a Union commander could always conduct reconnaissance, and if in close contact with the enemy, knew that inevitably his troops would either capture or receive deserted Confederate soldiers for interrogation.

Commanders still faced the constant challenge of acquiring accurate, timely, and relevant intelligence. Influencing factors included the methods, soldiers, and commanders used to do the collection, in addition to terrain, maps, vegetation, and communications. These potentially affected intelligence analysis, conducted by the commander or a designated subordinate. The results of the analytical process, sometimes driven more by personality than skill, ability, or experience created the potential for incorrect analysis or its misapplication.

These factors often diminished any opportunity a Union commander had to gain and or maintain the initiative. In the case of Grant, Meade, and the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign, rapidity of movement and the ability to exploit success outweighed the necessity for continued intelligence on Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The following chapter discusses how combat information and offensive reconnaissance

provided Grant and Meade with the most useful intelligence in their objective to destroy Lee's army north of Richmond.

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[47]Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union*, 5.

[48]Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources during the Civil War; A Case Study," *The Intelligence Revolution; A Historical Perspective*, 49.

[49]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 390, 421; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 273, 380, 411, 435, 492, 606. Review of the *Official Records* finds that the Second Corps, commanded by Hancock, provided the most IPW related reports from corps and below units in the Army of the Potomac.

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[56]Lanning, *Senseless Secrets*, 95-96.

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CHAPTER 3

INTELLIGENCE IN THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC DURING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

> Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can, and keep moving on.[1]
>
> Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, 1864

Introduction and Overview

Major General William T. Sherman, speaking about Grant, said, "[He] don't care a damn for what the enemy does out of his sight."[2] This statement provides insight into Grant's attitude concerning his use of intelligence during the Overland Campaign. It also captures, in general terms, the focus of intelligence collection in the Army of the Potomac as well.

The Army of the Potomac used a variety of methods to collect intelligence during the Overland Campaign. The BMI, as it existed, collected and produced intelligence mostly from the interrogation of EPWs as well as interviews with contrabands and the civilian populace.[3] Reconnaissance and surveillance, performed by BMI scouts, engineer officers, staff officers (including aides-de-camp), cavalry units, as well as line and signal corps soldiers all served as collectors and provided input to intelligence. In the few instances where it was feasible, the signal corps also provided raw SIGINT through the intercept of Confederate signal station communications. Captured documents, in addition to newspapers from Richmond, also provided a limited amount of intelligence. Status and situation reports, when provided by corps commanders, [4] furnished combat information that generally became intelligence, and tended to have more relevance in the close fight or in enemy contact as opposed to march column maneuvers. However, the most

common and probably the most useful form of intelligence collection came from the practice of offensive reconnaissance. The most prevalent use and best example of this type of intelligence collection happened during the two weeks at Spotsylvania.[5] A generalization of intelligence collection in the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign is that it arrived in bits and pieces with the flow dictated by the amount of contact and the ability to send it to Meade and Grant's headquarters for their analysis and use.

In keeping with the example of Napoleon and the theories as interpreted by Jomini, commanders conducted the majority of intelligence analysis personally and served as their own operations officer.[6] This was especially true for both Meade and Grant. However, in furnishing updates and summaries to Grant, his staff officers conducted analysis of the information they received and then presented it to Grant in either written or oral reports where they commented on its validity and or feasibility. Sharpe, who focused chiefly on interrogation during the campaign, provided analysis to the credibility of the intelligence gained from the EPWs. He commented on its substance with regard to other collected intelligence in the reports he submitted to Meade through his Chief of Staff, Major General Andrew A. Humphreys.[7]

The centralized receipt of collected intelligence occurred at Meade's headquarters where staff officers, especially Humphreys, served as the clearinghouse for both the receipt and dissemination of intelligence. The BMI, directed by Sharpe, had previously accomplished this under Hooker. However, with the change in leadership in the Army of the Potomac, so too changed the method by which the handling of intelligence occurred. With the advent of the telegraph, the dissemination of tactical combat information and

intelligence, with varying degrees of analysis, improved and occurred effectively, at least at the corps commander level. The successful dissemination of intelligence in the corps, similar to its collection, depended on the personality and leadership of the chain of command, which started with the corps commander.

The use of intelligence by two corps commanders--Hancock and Burnside--presents contrasting cases. The records of the Overland Campaign show that Hancock and his division commanders actively collected intelligence and frequently passed situation reports among themselves and to higher commanders.[8] Burnside, on the other hand, received constant guidance and direction to push out reconnaissance, which then usually required one or more inquiries for him to report what his reconnaissance had learned, or to simply report the activity and disposition of his corps. Brigadier General John A. Rawlins, Grant's personal Chief of Staff that he had brought with him when he came east, characterized intelligence in the Army of the Potomac by his frustration in the lack of information on the enemy as compared to Grant's time in the Western Theater.[9]

Terrain, Disposition and Organization of the Opposing Forces

Before discussing the use of intelligence during the Overland Campaign, it is necessary to establish a base of information and understanding about the terrain and the two opposing forces. The following is a generalized description of the terrain encountered by the Army of the Potomac, as well as the disposition and organization of both the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac at the outset of the Overland Campaign.

Terrain of the Overland Campaign

The terrain encountered by Grant and the Army of the Potomac was flat and wooded, and, in some places densely forested with heavy undergrowth, which made maneuver nearly impossible. Through the countryside ran numerous streams and rivers; with some fordable while others needed bridging because Lee's army had destroyed their bridges. The various rivers, differing in breadth and depth, often created a significant obstacle for the advance of the Army of the Potomac, even when not covered by Lee's troops. The roads traveled were often narrow and of poor condition, made worse by the spring rains that severely hindered the Army of the Potomac's advance along them. Though many veterans of the Army of the Potomac had seen part of Virginia, the movement east and south from Spotsylvania took them into unknown terrain, exacerbated by the lack and poor quality of the maps available.[10]

Disposition and Organization of the Army of Northern Virginia

Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had entrenched along the southern banks of the Rapidan River for almost twenty miles. Brigades from the Second and Third Corps' occupied these lines while the main body took position behind them, which provided the ability to support either flank. Detachments of General J. E. B. Stuart's cavalry watched the fords along the Confederate lines, with the remainder of his force situated along the Rappahannock River below Fredericksburg. The left or western end of the Confederate line bent back, away from the river, while the right or eastern end tied into the terrain known as the Wilderness. Longstreet's First Corps had returned from Tennessee and had moved to Gordonsville, Virginia, several miles west of the main line.[11] The Army of Northern Virginia consisted of three infantry corps, and a cavalry corps (see figure 1).

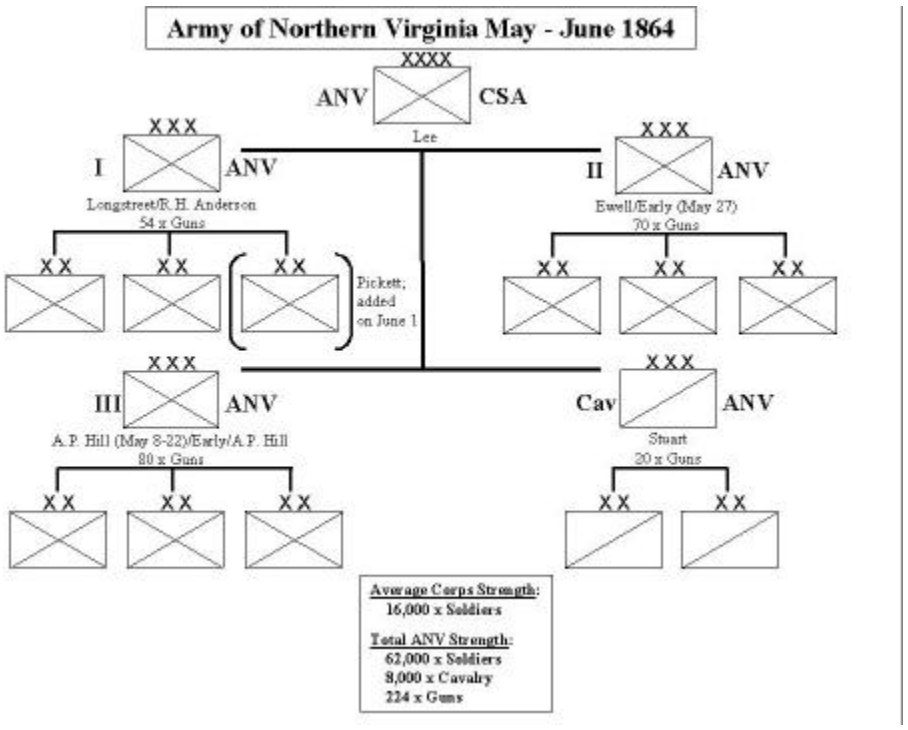

Figure 1. Organization of the Army of Northern Virginia

Source: J. H. Anderson, *Grant's Campaign in Virginia; May-June 30, 1864* (London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1908), 19-20.

Smaller than the Army of the Potomac, the Army of Northern Virginia would only total approximately 70,000 soldiers, but never at one time. However, it had the advantage of being in terrain that it knew, among a friendly population, and had some of the Confederate army's best and most capable leaders.

Disposition and Organization of the Army of the Potomac

The Army of the Potomac lay just north of the Rapidan River. It had remained there in winter quarters after the previous November's unsuccessful Mine Run Campaign. In this position, it covered and had a rail line of communications back to Washington. In March of 1864 Meade requested and received permission to consolidate and reorganize

the corps' of the Army of the Potomac. The brigades and regiments of the First and Third Corps, depleted from the previous years campaigns, merged with the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Corps' of the Army of the Potomac. Similar to Lee's Army, Meade also had three infantry corps' and a cavalry corps, but differed by having an artillery reserve and greater numbers in troops, horses, artillery and associated equipment (see figure 2).

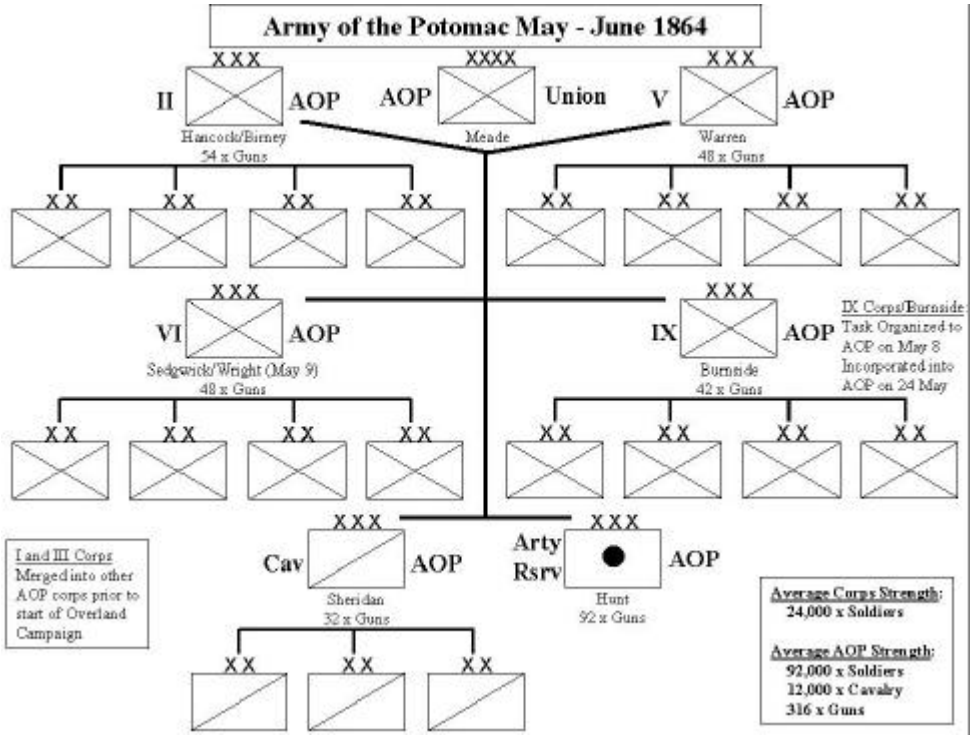

Figure 2. Organization of the Army of the Potomac

Source: J. H. Anderson, *Grant's Campaign in Virginia: May 1-June 30, 1864* (London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1908), 16-18.

However, the Army of the Potomac included Burnside's Ninth Corps and gave the Army of the Potomac strength of approximately 105,000 soldiers. Burnside's artillery added nearly a hundred more pieces, many of which Grant later sent back to Washington.

Artillery not only proved nearly useless in the woods and thickets of Virginia, but it also slowed the advance of the army, a key factor throughout the campaign.

Discussion of Methodology

The remainder of the chapter provides a general contextual overview of the Overland Campaign combined with a discussion of the collection and use of intelligence by the Army of the Potomac from 4 May to 12 June 1864. However, it does not cover the Army of the Potomac's move across the James River after Cold Harbor. Figures 3 and 4 show the campaign area and a timeline of the campaign to add context for the discussion and to portray the area and events of the Overland Campaign.

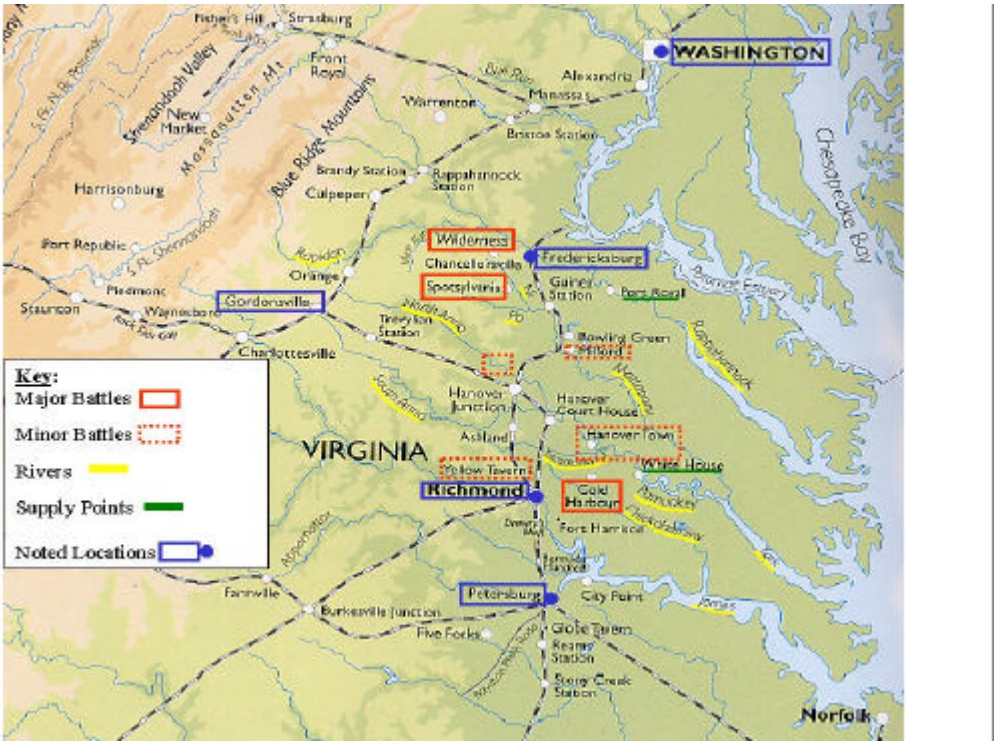

Figure 3. Map Depiction of the Overland Campaign, 4 May-12 June 1864

Source: Gary W. Gallagher, *The American Civil War: This Mighty Scourge of War* (Great Britain: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 166.

Figure 4. Time Line for the Overland Campaign, 4 May-2 June 1864

Sources: J. H. Anderson, *Grant's Campaign in Virginia; May-June 30, 1864* (London: Hugh Rees, Ltd., 1908), 23-30; John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), xxiv.

BMI and the Overland Campaign

In the months before the Overland Campaign began, Sharpe sent members of his staff to serve as liaison officers with other Union commands in Virginia. Captain John McEntee went to Harper's Ferry to assist Sigel's army in the Shenandoah. Lieutenant Frederick Manning went to Butler's Army of the James and worked with Lieutenant John I. Davenport of that headquarters.[12] Potentially, the BMI had several advantages as the Army of the Potomac's intelligence staff and organization. First, the BMI existed as an organized and permanent branch of the Provost Marshal General's staff and moved with the Army of the Potomac. This also meant that Sharpe reported directly to Meade, or was

available to him via his Chief of Staff, Major General Andrew A. Humphreys. Apparently and unfortunately, Meade disregarded the BMI's organization and efficiency, and made no use of its full capability during the campaign. Second, the considerably smaller area of operations in which the Army of the Potomac would fight reduced the amount of intelligence coverage for the BMI.[13] However, as Civil War intelligence historian William B. Feis wrote, "Grant [and Meade] would not fully utilize its services during the campaign from the Rapidan to Petersburg."[14] Despite its lack of use during the campaign, the BMI played an active role in preparation for the campaign.

Tactical Considerations in Planning the Overland Campaign

As Chief of Staff, Army of the Potomac, Humphreys was responsible for planning the movement across the Rapidan. He would later write the following about the Overland Campaign,

> A direct movement against Lee in the field so distant from Richmond as the Rapidan, would give opportunities of flanking operations by the whole army, and a freer handling . . . and therefore with more opportunities of success in destroying the power of the Army of Northern Virginia.[15]

Humphreys planning considerations included the size, disposition, and reaction time of Lee's army, the terrain, as well as the size and composition of the Army of the Potomac. Based on this, three courses of action needed consideration; attack Lee's center; turn Lee's left (western) flank, which had open terrain but involved protecting a longer line of communication; or, turn Lee's right (eastern) flank, which meant going through the Wilderness but with short lines of communication that took advantage of Virginia's tidewater.[16] Grant, who would make his field headquarters with the Army of the Potomac, weighed and compared the two flanking options, based on intelligence and logistics, and decided to direct Meade to attack by Lee's right in the east. On 9 April

1864, Grant told Meade "that Lee's army would be his objective,"[17] not Richmond. Furthermore, Grant issued Union Army-wide guidance, "I want all commanders to feel that hostile armies, and not cities, are to be their objective points."[18]

Intelligence Support to Campaign Planning

The intelligence required to plan the Overland Campaign involved both tactical and operational-level intelligence. This period would be the height of operational intelligence for the campaign, which had not yet begun. Once the campaign began, the distinction between operational and tactical level intelligence blurred, with tactical intelligence becoming the distinct type of intelligence used throughout the campaign.

With the decision made to undertake the campaign, two primary intelligence questions existed. The first concerned Confederate troop movement along the Rapidan, which included their location and disposition as well as that of Longstreet's First Corps returning to Virginia from Tennessee. This was important because the location of Longstreet determined his ability to support and increase the overall strength of Lee's army, in addition to the fact that Longstreet served as a key leader upon whom Lee depended. The second intelligence question, linked to the first, related to the tactical problem of which direction the Army of the Potomac should advance. Specifically, how could the Army of the Potomac avoid Lee's strong line of entrenchments south of the Rapidan near Mine Run? In addition, the question of which flank, east or west, of Lee's Army should become the direction of attack and axis of advance.

Efforts by BMI helped to answer these questions and began in earnest at the beginning of April 1864.[19] Brigadier General Marsena R. Patrick, Provost Marshal General, Army of the Potomac, mentioned one of these efforts in his 7 April 1864 diary

entry where he wrote, “Have been fitting up for [John] McEntee to go to Harpers Ferry tomorrow, and for the [BMI’s] scouts to be off on their India Rubber Boats across the river etc, etc.”[20] On 14 April the BMI’s scouts reported that Confederate fortifications covered only three ford sites across the Rapidan and that the proposed crossing sites for the Army of the Potomac were clear. The efforts of the scouts, mostly noncommissioned officers from various Union units, continued to focus on the fords and the intended crossing sites as well as the immediately adjacent areas on the south side of the Rapidan.

One remaining problem, however, was that adequate maps of the campaign’s area of operations were few. During the previous winter, the Army of the Potomac’s engineers had made an effort to create maps of what they could piece together from previous experience, locally produced maps, limited area reconnaissance, and interviews of local residents.[21] They distributed what they created, but the availability of trustworthy guides remained an issue. [22] Furthermore, the question of Longstreet’s disposition remained unanswered.

Initial reports and analysis provided to BMI from one of their contacts in Virginia predicted that Longstreet would not join Lee near the Rapidan, but push up the Shenandoah Valley in attempt to flank the Army of the Potomac at Culpeper, which would coincide with a northward attack by Lee across the Rapidan.[23] For most of April, the BMI received conflicting reports, such as Patrick’s 10 April diary entry, “We [the BMI] have some news from Lee’s Army, to the effect that Longstreet is about Lynchburg and is to come up and join Lee.”[24] As the end of April approached, the BMI was no closer to answering the question about Longstreet.

While the BMI's scouts continued their reconnaissance, Sharpe and McEntee stayed in near constant communication about the disposition of Longstreet and Lee's possible intentions.[25] In addition, Union signal stations conducted surveillance of Lee's two corps along the Rapidan River from positions on Pony, Garnett, and Stony Mountains. They provided constant reports of the activity they could see and included their own assessments.[26] On 25 April, based on EPW and deserter interrogations, rumor, and first hand observation, the BMI knew that Longstreet was near Charlottesville, Virginia. On 27 April, Grant sent a message to Halleck that stated, "There are rumors brought in by deserters that Longstreet reinforced by Beauregard's troops will move down the Shenandoah Valley."[27] Then, on 29 April, McEntee telegraphed Sharpe from his location with Sigel at Harper's Ferry and reported that Longstreet was near Gordonsville, which debunked the previous assumptions and settled the issue of Longstreet's location.

In the remaining days before the move across the Rapidan, both Meade and Grant continued to receive intelligence.[28] Grant received a message from Secretary of War Stanton telling him that a Confederate captain had deserted at Baltimore, Maryland, and allegedly knew Lee's disposition and plans.[29] Grant replied to Stanton and dismissed the information stating, "I do not place great reliance on the information because I do not see how an officer of that rank comes to know so much of future plans, but I will watch."[30] Meade received information more relevant to the tactical situation from a deserter on 2 May who indicated that no immediate movement by Lee's army was evident, and that everything was quiet along the Confederate lines. [31] This, combined with the surveillance of the signal stations and the reconnaissance conducted by BMI's scouts, provided Grant

and Meade with the relative assurance that they could now go forth with the execution of the plan.

Crossing the Rapidan

The Rapidan River equated to the military boundary between the United States and the Confederacy in the Eastern Theater. On the south side lay the Wilderness, approximately twelve miles wide and six miles deep. The only road south through the Wilderness was the Brock Road, intersected by two east-west roads, the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road, which would figure prominently during the battle.[32] As planned, the Army of the Potomac began its movement at midnight on 4 May 1864 and crossed the Rapidan into the Wilderness without incident.

Battle of the Wilderness Overview

The terrain of the Wilderness proved its namesake. It was an expanse of densely forested woods with heavy undergrowth cross cut by streams and shallow ravines. It offered practically no open area for the massing and forming of regiments and brigades into battle lines. The fighting took place in the woods, where units quickly became disorganized, and officers lost control because they could not see further than ten to twenty meters in any given direction. Road bound, the artillery became useless, and the cavalry nearly ineffective. Since this terrain affected both sides, it placed both armies on near equal terms. Though Grant had not intended to fight Lee here, he seized the opportunity to gain the initiative and turned to attack Lee, which began the first battle of the Overland Campaign (see figure 5).

After the Civil War, Humphreys wrote the following about the Wilderness,

> So far as I know, no great battle ever took place before on such ground. But little of the combatants could be seen, and its progress was known to the

senses chiefly by the rising and falling sounds of a vast musketry that continually swept along the lines of battle.[33]

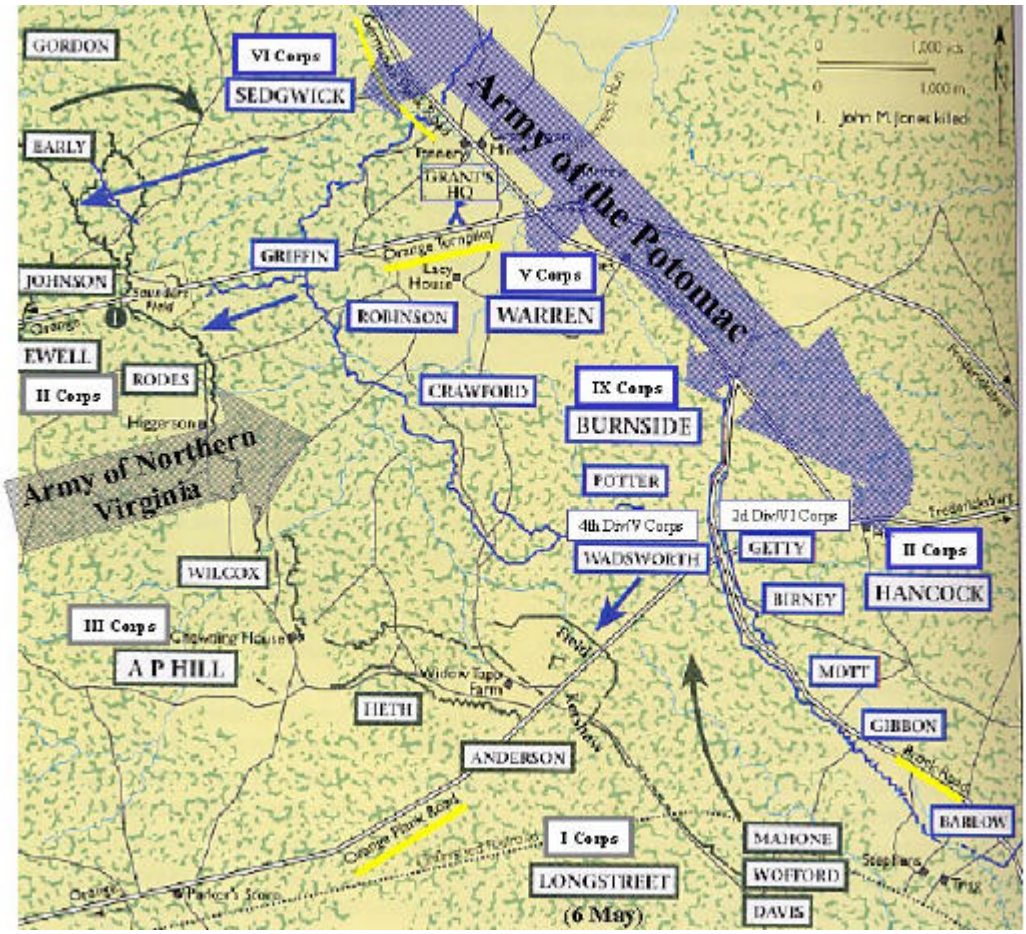

Figure 5. Battle of the Wilderness, 5-6 May 1864

Source: Gary W. Gallagher, *The American Civil War; This Mighty Scourge of War* (Great Britain: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 186.

On the morning of 5 May, as the Army of the Potomac advanced southward through the Wilderness, the lead corps identified Lee's approach from the west.[34] Grant and Meade agreed that they should seize the initiative and ordered the lead corps to halt its march, turn, and attack. Over the next seventy-two hours, ending on 7 May, the Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia attacked and repulsed one another as

they fumbled through the dense woods and thick vegetation. Because of this terrain, any possible exploitation of a successful attack quickly dissipated as the assaulting force found itself disarrayed by the terrain and not in contact with its adjacent supporting units.[35] As predicted, the Confederates made the most of this natural obstacle against the advantage of the numerically superior Army of the Potomac. On the final day of battle, after finding Lee's army entrenched in a strong defensive position, Grant made the decision to disengage and continue to push southward around Lee's right (eastern) flank towards Spotsylvania.

Intelligence during the Battle of the Wilderness

On 4 May, preceded by infantry and two cavalry divisions,[36] the Army of the Potomac advanced across two ford sites on the Rapidan and continued along two axis of advance. The third division of Sheridan's cavalry corps stayed north of the river in over watch to prevent a Confederate envelopment from the rear.[37] During the morning, Grant sent a message to Halleck, "The crossing of the Rapidan effected. Forty eight hours now will demonstrate whether the enemy intends giving battle this side of Richmond."[38] Just after 1:00 P.M., the first intercept of a Confederate message occurred for the campaign. The deciphered message indicated that Lee knew of the Army of the Potomac's movement and that elements of the Army of Northern Virginia had begun movement toward them. According to Porter, when Grant read the intercept he said, "That gives just the information I wanted. It shows that Lee is drawing out from his position, and is pushing across to meet us."[39] Less than twenty-four hours later Grant's analysis proved true and the Battle of the Wilderness began.

Essentially, the Army of the Potomac used four methods of intelligence collection after they crossed the Rapidan and engaged the Confederates at the Wilderness. These included cavalry reconnaissance, SIGINT, the interrogation of prisoners, and combat information. Even combined, these methods produced minimal intelligence, which limited Grant and Meade in their ability to conduct analysis to aid in their decision-making. The most disappointing producer of intelligence occurred with the cavalry even though intelligence collection was not their primary focus at the Wilderness.

Though two divisions of Sheridan's cavalry lead the initial advance into the Wilderness while one covered the crossing sites, his cavalry's primary responsibility concerned the protection of the Army of the Potomac's logistics trains of nearly four thousand wagons. However, once the battle began on 5 May, Sheridan left a cavalry detachment with the trains and maneuvered to attack Lee's cavalry.[40] Successful in checking the Confederate cavalry's attempt to turn the Union's left flank,[41] Sheridan's cavalry provided little value as a reconnaissance and intelligence collection asset. The terrain of the Wilderness hindered the use of cavalry, much as it did nearly any form of organized maneuver, but Sheridan's cavalry would not locate Lee's Second nor his First Corps' over the period of 5 and 6 May, respectively. This is partly because Sheridan never forgot nor ignored his primary task to protect the logistics trains, which included counter-cavalry operations. Burnside's Ninth Corps also possessed cavalry. However, based on a recommendation by Meade, Grant had to prompt Burnside to use them. Even then, the guidance given to Burnside only directed that he deploy his cavalry "to watch the extreme right by the fords, letting them go out on all roads toward the enemy; and if enough can be spared to cross the [Rapidan] river, they might scout on the other side."[42]

Though Burnside reported compliance, his cavalry produced no intelligence. In the end, the SIGINT intercept of 4 May provided more intelligence value than the combined efforts of Sheridan and Burnside's cavalry.

The Army of the Potomac's signal soldiers intercepted and deciphered one Confederate message during the course of the battle. Though vague, the message sent to the Army of Northern Virginia's Second Corps proved valuable in that it alerted Grant and Meade to the fact that Lee knew of their movement. As in so many other instances during the battle of the Wilderness, the flat terrain and thick vegetation prevented the Union signal soldiers from further signal interceptions. Fortunately, the capture and interrogation of prisoners helped to fill the intelligence gap that neither the cavalry nor SIGINT could.

A seemingly almost unending source of potential intelligence resulted from the capture of Confederate soldiers. Humphreys recollected "An examination of prisoners during the night of the 5th, drew from them the statement that Longstreet was expected."[43] This proved true as Longstreet did attack the next day. However, the anticipation and measures taken to protect against Longstreet's arrival during 6 May caused Hancock to reallocate a portion of his corps that may have allowed him the ability to make more successful attacks with the remainder of his force.[44] The bulk of information gained from the interrogation of prisoners often produced accurate intelligence that helped build or complete enemy order of battle charts maintained by the BMI.[45] However, prisoners also gave speculative information that sometimes proved untrue. On 8 May, as the Army of the Potomac moved away from the Wilderness, one of Grant's staff officers reported a prisoner's assessment of Lee's army, "the men are

greatly exhausted by fatigue."[46] This may have been true, but it did not affect the resolve of Lee's army to fight Grant, which they tenaciously did throughout the campaign. This left only one other identified form of intelligence collection used by the Union at the Wilderness: combat information.

Even though combat information is raw and unevaluated data, it provided another means of filling the gaps in knowledge about the Army of Northern Virginia. Again, the terrain of the Wilderness became a hindrance to, as Grant stated, "getting information on the proximity of the enemy."[47] Soldiers on the line provided the most accurate combat information on the morning of 7 May. In his personal memoirs, Grant wrote, "Pickets and skirmishers were sent along our entire line to find the position of the enemy."[48] At noon, Grant directed the Fifth Corps commander, Warren, to conduct offensive reconnaissance. Warren complied and drew Confederate fire but did not become decisively engaged. These efforts provided Grant the intelligence to allow him to analyze Lee's disposition and determine that he held his entrenchments too strongly to pursue another day of fighting at the Wilderness. Here, intelligence proved beneficial to analysis and decision-making.

As demonstrated by the methods used and the intelligence produced during the Wilderness, it is clear that having little sufficient knowledge of the enemy challenged Meade and Grant's ability to conduct analysis. On the morning of 5 May, when Warren's Fifth Corps identified and reported Lee's army on the Orange Pike, Meade incorrectly analyzed what this meant. In a report to Grant about the situation, he wrote, "I think the enemy is trying to delay our movement and will not give battle but of this we shall soon see."[49] Even though Meade incorrectly identified Lee's intent, this did not affect the

decision to attempt to seize the initiative and attack. Even after nearly three days of constant fighting, the Army of the Potomac never gained the initiative. In a renewed attempt to claim it, Grant disengaged the Army of the Potomac and moved toward Spotsylvania.

Battle of Spotsylvania Court House Overview

Lee quickly realized what Grant intended, and the race to Spotsylvania began. As the Army of the Potomac advanced along the Brock Road, intermittently challenged by elements of Lee's cavalry and infantry, the Army of Northern Virginia moved along a parallel route. Unhindered, the lead corps of Lee's army reached the area of Spotsylvania Court House first and entrenched.

On the morning of 8 May, the lead corps of the Army of the Potomac arrived at Spotsylvania Court House, not knowing that Lee had beaten them there, and attacked what they mistook as cavalry. They were repulsed while the remainder of both armies continued to arrive and entrenched into facing positions between the Po and Ny Rivers (see figure 6). Over the course of two weeks the battle occurred at a much slower rate, with little maneuver, and with less densely forested terrain then the Wilderness.

Though the Army of the Potomac would nearly achieve victory during the course of an assault that decidedly penetrated the Confederate lines, it did not have lasting success because the supporting corps' failed to make their assaults in a timely and effective manner. Within days, Lee countered with his last large scale offensive for the remainder of the campaign, but his effort also failed. In the end, Grant would again make the decision to disengage and advance south by Lee's right (eastern) flank and drive

further into Virginia to the North Anna River and where Sheridan would return from his raid on Richmond.

During the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, the majority of Sheridan's cavalry corps, with Grant's permission, detached and raided toward Richmond. Aside from the raid itself, the most significant event that occurred was the cavalry battle at Yellow Tavern. Here, Sheridan fought and defeated the famed Confederate cavalry leader, J. E. B. Stuart. The battle resulted in Stuart's mortal wounding[50] and ended the dominance of Lee's cavalry. Afterwards, Sheridan and his troopers destroyed rail and supplies, freed more than three hundred Union prisoners, and entered the outer entrenchments of Richmond before they moved to the James River for re-supply.[51] Once his troopers and horses had rested and replenished, Sheridan and his cavalry returned and linked up with the Army of the Potomac during its engagements with Lee at the North Anna River.[52]

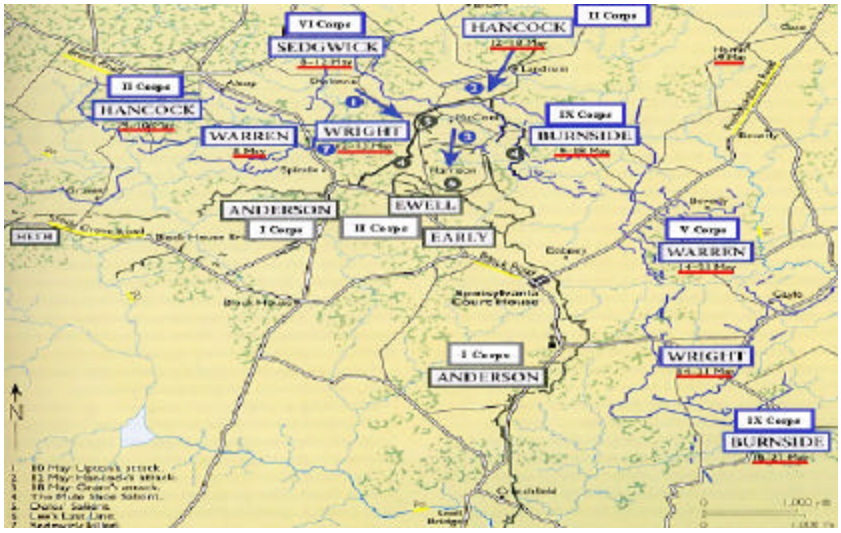

Figure 6. Battle of the Spotsylvania Court House, 8-19 May 1864

Source: Gary W. Gallagher, *The American Civil War; This Mighty Scourge of War* (Great Britain: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 191.

Intelligence during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House

While the battle of the Wilderness had two opposing forces groping to find each other, and hoping they had friendly units adjacent to them, the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House was the opposite. The opposing forces knew what friendly units were to their left and right, and had a good idea of the location and extent of each other's lines. What resulted over the two weeks of fighting was a series of offensive reconnoitering conducted by the Army of the Potomac. Though intended to firmly identify the location of the enemy's lines, they also served to find weak points. Upon such a discovery, and unless specifically ordered not to, the Union reconnaissance elements attempted to assault and exploit it. For this reason they were characterized as offensive reconnaissance.

This, however, was only one form of intelligence collection used during the two-week battle at Spotsylvania Court House. The Army of the Potomac used other forms of reconnaissance and surveillance, which included scouts, skirmishers and pickets of infantry and cavalry, as well as signal unit, engineer, leader and staff reconnaissance.[53] IPW existed as the only other noted form of intelligence collection, with the exception of one intercepted message,[54] that contributed to Grant and Meade's ability to perform analysis. However, reconnaissance, regardless of how conducted, remained the predominate form of combat information and intelligence collection.

On the morning of 8 May, Hancock's Second Corps moved toward Spotsylvania Court House by way of Todd's Tavern. Here, they relieved the one division of Sheridan's cavalry that had not gone with him on his raid to Richmond. The cavalry division's skirmishers had located and engaged the Confederate cavalry, which had three fold significances. First, they had identified a sizable portion of Lee's cavalry and their

disposition. Second, because they had engaged the Confederate cavalry, this meant they had fixed them and negated their ability to conduct offensive and/or reconnaissance operations against the Army of the Potomac. Third, because the Army of the Potomac only had one of Sheridan's cavalry divisions with it at Spotsylvania, now engaged with Lee's cavalry, this meant that they too could not perform any reconnaissance. Despite this discovery, the location, disposition, and intent of the Army of Northern Virginia remained unclear to Grant.

Just after 10:00 A.M. on 9 May, Grant directed Meade to send scouts out along the several roads leading in and out of Spotsylvania Court House to identify enemy movement. An hour later, Grant sent Halleck a message that stated, "It is not yet demonstrated what the enemy will do."[55] Later that day Grant sent a message to Burnside and informed him, "The enemy have made a strong resistance here, so much that no advance will be attempted tomorrow."[56] The next day Burnside advanced and turned Lee's right flank, but achieved no decisive results. The factors that contributed to his failure included unfamiliarity with the area and the concealment of the Confederate lines provided by the terrain. With the cause of Burnside's failure realized, Grant issued orders to "Devote the day principally to placing all the troops in position, reconnoitering the enemy's line, and getting in readiness for a combined attack."[57] Thus began the reconnaissance effort of the Army of the Potomac.

Though the Union's reconnaissance effort lasted throughout the two weeks, a concerted effort took place from 9 to 11 May. In order to learn the enemy disposition, Humphreys wrote, "The skirmishers of the Fifth and Sixth Corps were pushed forward so as to develop the position and character of the enemy's works, and ascertain where they

were probably vulnerable."[58] The Civil War historian Gary W. Gallagher described the information they collected and reported as a "vast array of complex defenses."[59] This intelligence still assisted Grant and Meade in the development of attack plans. Even though Grant had ordered a general reconnaissance effort, for most commanders this equated to an implied task. On 10 May, Warren, the Fifth Corps Commander, had made two offensive reconnaissance efforts before noon. In contrast, and probably partially due to the fact that Burnside's Ninth Corps had been a separate corps until aligned under Meade on 8 May, Grant specifically ordered Burnside to conduct an offensive reconnaissance to his front the same day.[60]

The reconnaissance effort of the Army of the Potomac continued throughout 11 May, which is all that Grant intended to do that day. The only exchanges of fire that occurred between the opposing armies resulted from the nature of the Union's offensive reconnaissance. The result of these efforts identified the salient that became the "Bloody Angle." Though correctly identified as a point of vulnerability, which the Army of the Potomac exploited with Hancock's Second Corps, the result did not produce decisive results due to the failures of the supporting corps. However, the preparation to conduct any attack necessitated the involvement of staff officers in the intelligence collection process.

During any preparatory phase prior to any one of the attacks conducted by the Union at Spotsylvania Court House, staff officers gathered all the information they could concerning the direction and position of attack planned against Lee's line. However, staff officers performed other intelligence related duties as well. Porter, as an officer on

Grant's staff, recalled the duties that he and the other staff officers performed at Spotsylvania Court House.

> Staff officers had to labor day and night during the present campaign in making reconnaissances and in cross-questioning natives, deserters, prisoners, and fugitive Negroes, in an attempt to secure data.[61]

Even though the work of staff officers contributed in many ways to the intelligence collection effort, the preponderance of their duties in this regard seemed to focus on reconnaissance for the pre-positioning of an attack. However, this work was not theirs alone; commanders had to perform their share of reconnaissance so they could effectively lead their units in attack.

Major General Emory Upton, then a colonel and brigade commander, provided a shining example of leadership and command involvement in intelligence focused on the preparation for an attack. In the allotted time before an attack, Upton routinely practiced "deliberate study, which he made of the positions he was directed to assault."[62] Furthermore, he and his regimental commanders conducted a leader's reconnaissance of the area where his brigade would form, and studied the terrain over which they would attack. Upton also had the initiative to use soldiers within his command to conduct surveillance of the enemy. This seems like an obvious and cautious practice that occurred on a regular basis, and that Upton was probably not the only commander that acted in this way, but the research for this thesis has found little other specific mention aside from Upton. Regardless, the practice of reconnaissance and observation of the enemy not only provided combat information and intelligence, it also served to help verify the information gained from IPW.

The capture and interrogation of prisoners, practically guaranteed to happen on a regular basis during the Overland Campaign, did not yield as much intelligence at Spotsylvania as it did prior to and after the battle. The Army of the Potomac captured prisoners continually, and often in large quantity, during the two weeks at Spotsylvania Court House. Once the Army of the Potomac had established the enemy's strength, disposition, and exact location of their entrenchments, the information gained from IPW reports served primarily to update the Confederate order of battle charts, or to inform Grant and Meade of other information not immediately applicable to the current tactical situation. This does not mean that IPW produced irrelevant information, but that the most relevant information gained from IPW occurred during the opening and closing days of the battle, especially as Grant prepared to move the Army of the Potomac again past Lee's right. Along with IPW, the intelligence derived from reconnaissance, surveillance, and combat information all contributed to the process of analysis.

During the two-week period at Spotsylvania Court House, all commanders in the Army of the Potomac, not just Meade and Grant, performed varying levels of analysis. However, Grant conducted the analysis that determined the Army of the Potomac's actions. In reviewing the various sources used to research and write this thesis, Grant appeared to have conducted two levels of analysis, operational and tactical. From the operational perspective, Grant tended to perform inaccurate analysis concerning the intent of Lee's army. On the morning of 13 May, Grant sent Meade a message that stated, "From the dispatches just shown me by Capt. Meade [General Meade's son and aide de camp] I do not infer the enemy are making a stand but simply covering a retreat."[63] As events unfolded over the next week and a half, this proved untrue. At the tactical level,

Grant had the ability to conduct accurate analysis of intelligence and the situation at hand. He demonstrated this by the several messages he sent to the division commander that protected the Army of the Potomac's logistics trains, which he ably defended based on Grant's analysis and guidance. The more important tactical analysis, however, came in the closing days of the battle where Grant used combat information and the intelligence provided to call off the planned attack for 19 May. Unfortunately, he had no intelligence to inform him of the Confederate attack against his lines that occurred the day his cancelled attack would have taken place. Even so, elements of the Army of the Potomac continued to conduct offensive reconnaissance against the Confederate lines until they disengaged and began the next move around Lee's right and to the south.

North Anna River Overview

The Battle of North Anna River occurred in a series of semi-disjointed skirmishes and engagements between the individual corps' of each army. Again, Grant would find Lee strongly entrenched, unfeasible to attack without severe loss. With this assessment made, Grant once more moved the Army of the Potomac by Lee's right (eastern) flank and advanced toward Hanover Town, which would lead him to Cold Harbor.

Intelligence from Spotsylvania Court House through North Anna River

In his personal memoirs, Grant described the terrain and the lack of maps, as well as the actions taken to help the situation while he maintained movement security.

> We were now to operate in a different country from any we had before seen in Virginia. The roads were wide and good, and the country well cultivated. No men were seen except those bearing arms, even the black man having been sent away. The country, however, was new to us, and we had neither guides nor maps to tell us where the roads were, or where they led to. Engineer and staff officers were put to the dangerous duty of supplying the place of both maps and guides. By reconnoitering they were enabled to locate the roads in the vicinity of

> each army corps. Our course was south, and we took all roads leading in that direction which would not separate the army too widely.[64]

Initially, the move of the Army of the Potomac remained unknown to Lee, but an intercepted and deciphered Confederate message informed Grant that Lee was aware of his movement as he crossed the Mattapony River on 21 May.[65] One of the Fifth Corps outposts confirmed this that evening when they "heard the noise of troops passing along the Telegraph Road all night,"[66] followed by the observation of their supply wagons the next morning. With it now known the enemy was near, on 22 May Grant ordered each corps to send out cavalry and infantry in advance of their movement to find Lee's army. Later that day the Army of the Potomac captured soldiers from Lee's army and learned that not only had the Army of Northern Virginia moved south of the North Anna River, but had been reinforced by General George E. Pickett's division from Richmond.[67] With an idea of Lee's strength, location, and disposition, the Army of the Potomac continued toward North Anna River.

The information from the local population and escaped slaves provided HUMINT for the Army of the Potomac on Lee's army as they continued to advance toward North Anna River on 23 May. Through reconnaissance, offensive and otherwise, as well as direct contact and limited engagement, Grant continued to develop a picture of the size, strength, location and disposition of the Army of Northern Virginia south of the North Anna River.[68] When Grant admitted in a message to Burnside on the night of 24 May, "The situation of the enemy appearing so different from what I expected,"[69] he started the formulation of his analysis that concluded that Lee's army, now reinforced, held an exceptionally strong position south of the North Anna River. With his analysis and assessment made, Grant decided that any attack would result in severe loss and issued

orders that began another march past Lee's right flank and further south towards Cold Harbor.

Intelligence from North Anna to Cold Harbor

The intelligence collected during the move from North Anna to Cold Harbor used infantry and cavalry reconnaissance, combat information, IPW reports, SIGINT, and direct observation. The withdrawal from the North Anna began with Sheridan's cavalry deployed as a deception to cover the Army of the Potomac's disengagement. On 28 May, Grant recorded that "Sheridan was directed to reconnoiter towards Mechanicsville to find Lee's position,"[70] which resulted in an engagement between the cavalry of the two armies. The following day, the Second, Fifth, and Sixth Corps of the Army of the Potomac conducted offensive reconnaissance to find Lee's army while Sheridan guarded on the left and Burnside's Ninth Corps remained in reserve. All four of the reconnoitering corps found and engaged elements of Lee's army.

On 30 May, the Army of the Potomac began to develop the situation as they conducted IPW of captured Confederate soldiers and continued their offensive reconnaissance towards Cold Harbor. By late afternoon, Grant and Meade's shared analysis reasoned that Lee had withdrawn behind the Chickahominy River. The corps commanders received orders to continue their offensive reconnaissance. In the mean time, Major General William F. Smith and the Eighteenth Corps from the Army of the James had moved to White House on the Pamunkey River to reinforce the Army of the Potomac. Based on the current enemy situation, Grant warned Smith that Lee might try to interdict his march from White House and sent Sheridan to reconnoiter towards Cold Harbor to aid in his movement. By 31 May, Grant had enough information to make

positive identification of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia entrenched along the Bethesda Church Road at Cold Harbor.

Cold Harbor Overview

Several cavalry and infantry engagements punctuated the movement by way of Hanover Town that ended in a similar situation as the start of Spotsylvania, but with the destination of Cold Harbor. Once more, Lee's army reached the impending battle area first and entrenched. Sheridan's cavalry fought a stiff fight[71] against Lee's infantry while the Second, Fifth and Sixth corps of the Army of the Potomac met continual resistance in their advance. Sheridan held his position until relieved by the main body of the Army of the Potomac, which assumed a line of defense opposite of the Confederates. Though the Army of Northern Virginia possessed a strong line of defense, only partly known and understood by Grant, Meade and the corps commanders, the Army of the Potomac made two concerted efforts to take the Confederate lines. Both attacks resulted in severe casualties and achieved no success. During the second attempt, Grant ordered a halt before further casualties occurred.

Over the next few days, the Army of the Potomac attempted to develop the situation, but the proximity of the opposing lines prevented any potential for another Union effort. As with each previous battle in the campaign, Grant once more disengaged and moved the Army of the Potomac to cross the James River, by way of Lee's right. However, this time Grant managed to elude Lee for upwards of seventy-two hours before Lee fully grasped the situation. With Grant's decision to disengage on 12 June, this ended the significant portions of the Overland Campaign used to discuss intelligence collection and application for this thesis.

Intelligence at the Battle of Cold Harbor

In a letter to his sister on 5 June 1864, Major General Emory Upton wrote,

> We are now at Cold Harbor, where we have been since June 1st. On that day we had a murderous engagement. I say murderous, because we were recklessly ordered to assault the enemy's entrenchments, knowing neither their strength nor position.[72]

This last sentence pointedly characterized the conduct of intelligence collection and use during the Battle of Cold Harbor. Sharpe, who had contributed IPW reports and analysis throughout the campaign, now performed an additional duty unrelated to his role as chief of the BMI; defense counsel for a local man accused of rape. General Marsena Patrick briefly mentioned this in his diary entry of 2 June, "Colonel Sharpe being assigned, by the Court, to defend the prisoner."[73] Though Sheridan's cavalry conducted reconnaissance along the Chickahominy and guarded the Army of the Potomac's right on 2 and 3 June, it provided little if any intelligence on Lee's entrenchments.

There were several indications and warnings that Lee had established a much stronger defense than realized. On 31 May, Hancock's reporting of his division's progress to Meade's headquarters mentioned that prisoners taken had heard "chopping" during the night. Moreover, Hancock included mention of a report from Wright that identified Confederate entrenchments on advantageous terrain with breastworks and abatis. Other corps commanders made similar reports as they pressed on to Cold Harbor.[74]

The vagueness of intelligence concerning the strength and disposition of Lee's entrenchments continued into 2 June where a message from Meade to Grant clearly portrayed that the Army of the Potomac had still not fully developed the enemy situation. In another letter to his sister concerning the Army of the Potomac's efforts on 3 June,

Upton wrote, "Assault after assault has been ordered upon the enemy's entrenchments, when they know nothing about the strength or position of the enemy."[75] The only intelligence collected on the enemy resulted from limited offensive reconnaissance conducted by two of the corps, and the combat information received during the two days of severe and unprecedented loss endured by the Army of the Potomac. The reasons for why Grant and Meade lacked the intelligence that may or may not have changed their decision making process is speculative.

There are several factors to consider. One, and a theme that spanned the entire campaign, is terrain and vegetation. Parts of the confederate lines tied into swamps, while other parts had the advantage of interlocking fires that covered terrain that benefited the defense and severely hampered offensive reconnaissance. Another, a perception derived from research, is that Lee's occupation of Cold Harbor potentially threatened the Army of the Potomac's lines of communications to the tidewater landings by which they received supplies. This situation might have created a reckless haste to prevent Lee from doing such, and accelerated the effort to both dislodge and or defeat him without the level of reconnaissance used at Spotsylvania Court House.

A significant contributing factor, despite excellent logistics, is that by this point in the campaign the residual effect of little rest had left all in the Army of the Potomac exhausted. This probably affected some commander's abilities to fulfill their command obligations and responsibilities. Tied to this consideration is the analysis that of the four infantry corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac, discounting Smith as a reinforcing corps, only Hancock and Wright had continually exhibited the ability to command their corps in a sound and timely manner.

Warren was slow and methodical while Burnside was clearly outright incompetent.[76] This contributed a great deal to the lost opportunities for the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign. Whatever the other factors that might have contributed are, a decided lack of intelligence collection, use, and analysis existed at Cold Harbor. This includes the several key indicators about the possible strength of Lee's defense that were either unrealized or ignored. This resulted in the uninformed decisions by Grant and Meade to proceed with the assaults on 1 and 3 June, which Grant finally stopped after he provided guidance that the 3 June assaults should only go forth if feasible.[77] After halting the offensive effort, Grant ordered each corps to conduct reconnaissance to their front at 12:30 P.M. This happened in only a limited capacity and no more assaults equal to that day's killing occurred. As it happened, the Army of the Potomac remained at Cold Harbor, entrenched closely to Lee's lines, but in such disadvantageous ground that the slightest movement drew fire.[78] On 12 June, Grant decided once more to disengage and again moved past Lee's right and toward the James River.

Conclusion

In a letter to Halleck on 5 June 1864 Grant wrote,

> My idea from the start has been to beat Lee's Army, if possible, North of Richmond, then after destroying his lines of communication North of the James River to transfer the Army to the South side and besiege Lee in Richmond, or follow him South if he should retreat.[79]

The Overland Campaign, which resembled one long constant battle that encompassed engagements of varied duration, did not fully achieve Grant's intent. Lee had successfully fought on the defensive in a series of delaying actions and only conducted limited attacks when the terrain or situation provided the advantage. Even so, Lee never achieved

decisive results against Grant and the Army of the Potomac. Because of this, Grant continued to march the Army of the Potomac continually by Lee's right and deeper into Virginia. Even though Grant did not achieve his envisioned end state in the period of 4 May to 12 June, tactical intelligence allowed him to continue operational maneuver.

The methods of intelligence collection in the Army of the Potomac only varied in slight degree from battle to battle and for each move around Lee's right flank to push further southward. The predominate forms of intelligence collection that emerged consisted of reconnaissance, (especially offensive reconnaissance,) IPW, and combat information. Reconnaissance, however, took on many forms.

Throughout the Overland Campaign, the Army of the Potomac used infantry, cavalry, signal soldiers, staff officers, and BMI scouts as reconnaissance assets. Only until after North Anna River did Sheridan's cavalry take on a more dedicated reconnaissance and surveillance role. In the interim, soldiers from the signal corps, who could not perform their regular duties because of the flat and wooded terrain, performed reconnaissance along with BMI's scouts. Staff officers and commanders also performed limited levels of reconnaissance that primarily focused on pre-attack preparation. However, once entrenched or in contact with the enemy, the infantry performed offensive reconnaissance, which produced combat information and intelligence. Aside from intelligence collection, these efforts continually produced another source of intelligence by the capture of Confederate soldiers.

IPW helped fill the gap in intelligence about the enemy, but the value and veracity of the information gained occurred on a nearly case-by-case basis. Sharpe and Babcock from the BMI conducted the majority of IPW in the Overland Campaign. In addition,

staff officers and commanders from the capturing units also conducted their own IPW. However, the information gained from IPW served mostly to monitor what Confederate units the Army of the Potomac engaged, which helped to establish and maintain order of battle charts, but sometimes also provided more tactically relevant intelligence. In other instances, the information gained was either misleading or did not contribute to the present tactical situation. Regardless, IPW and combat information gained from offensive reconnaissance became the two constant sources of intelligence for analysis.

The function of intelligence analysis in the Army of the Potomac, as with the rest of the Union Army, remained in the realm of a commander's responsibility. Meade and Grant, by nature of their positions, served as the chief intelligence analysts in the Army of the Potomac. Both performed analysis relatively well, sometimes assisted by their staff, but also had instances of misanalysis. Fortunately for them and the Army of the Potomac, their incorrect analysis of a bit or mass of intelligence never resulted in a defeat.

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[1]Rafuse, *George Gordon Meade and the War in the East*, 118.

[2]Adams, *Fighting for Defeat*, 163-164.

[3]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 51, 695-696.

[4]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, entire work. In researching Part-2 of vol. 36, there is an obvious disparity among the corps commanders and reporting. Only certain corps commanders provided constant and or relevant reports to Meade's headquarters throughout the campaign.

[5]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 191-192. These pages recount the events at Spotsylvania Courthouse from Meade's 1 November 1864 report of the overall campaign.

[6]Gunther E Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978), 129.

[7]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 601, 725-726, 746-747. The pages cited are the best examples of Sharpe providing Meade what we would call an intelligence summary.

[8]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 410, 439, 443, 446-447; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 84, 148, 149, 328-329, 380-381, 434, 443, 606. These pages are good representations of the types of seemingly constant situation reports that Hancock sent to Meade's headquarters. Both Part-2 and 3 of vol. 36 are full of other similar reports.

[9]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 196.

[10]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 392.

[11]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 2.

[12]Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union*, 543-544.

[13]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 197, or Part 1-3, 1st ser., vol. 36.

[14]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 201.

[15]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 8-9.

[16]Anderson, *Grant's Campaign in Virginia*, 33-34.

[17]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 6.

[18]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 37.

[19]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 201.

[20]Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 355-356.

[21]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 293.

[22]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 205-206.

[23]Ibid., 201.

[24]Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 357.

[25]US War Department, *Official Records*, 1st ser., vol. 33, 954, 999, 1003.

[26]Ibid., 1015, 1024, 1025; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 334-335.

[27]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 361.

[28]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 346-347, 372. The intelligence received was a combination of operational and tactical, provided by the USN, the Army of the James, and Sharpe.

[29]US War Department, *Official Records*, 1st ser., vol. 33, 1022-1023.

[30]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 381.

[31]Ibid., 564.

[32]Gallagher, *The American Civil War; This Mighty Scourge of War*, 185-186.

[33]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 55.

[34]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 189.

[35]Ibid., 321.

[36]Ibid., 189.

[37]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 397.

[38]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 381 and 397.

[39]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 43-44.

[40]Ibid., 48.

[41]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 190.

[42]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 438.

[43]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 37.

[44]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 320-321.

[45]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 405, 597, 842-843; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 184, 492, 527. The pages cited are examples of Sharpe's reports where he discuses the information gained from IPW and includes what units the prisoners were from. John Babcock used this information to compile and maintain an order of battle for the Confederate units the Army of the Potomac faced, which helped to estimate size and location.

[46]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 527.

[47]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 403.

[48]Ibid.

[49]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 403.

[50]Ibid., 193.

[51]Ibid., 191.

[52]Ibid., 193.

[53]Ibid., 281, 283, 297-298, 330-331, 360-361; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 699, 842-843. These pages, from Part 1 and 2 of vol. 36 reflect the combined efforts of infantry, engineers, and signal corps soldiers that resulted in constant reconnaissance of the Confederate lines at Spotsylvania Courthouse.

[54]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 2, 1st ser., vol. 36, 909.

[55]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 411.

[56]Ibid., 413.

[57]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 88.

[58]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 71.

[59]Gallagher, *The American Civil War; This Might Scourge of War*, 193.

[60]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 417.

[61]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 121.

[62]Michie, *The Life and Letters of General Upton*, 115.

[63]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 441.

[64]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 429.

[65]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 132.

[66]Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865*, 125.

[67]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 7.

[68]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 142; Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 10, 483-484; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 119, 120.

[69]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 484-485.

[70]Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 436.

[71]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 361.

[72]Michie, *The Life and Letters of General Upton*, 109.

[73]Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 381.

[74]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 380, 381, 386, 411, 435, 443.

[75]Michie, *The Life and Letters of General Upton*, 108.

[76]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 192; US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 348-349, 361, 493. This assertion comes from the overall research conducted. There is probably a consensus among most Civil War historians that it is correct. The pages cited provide some insight into this through the reporting and message traffic, though it may not seem that obvious to the casual reader without further research.

[77]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 3, 1st ser., vol. 36, 526.

[78]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 301.

[79]Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. 11, 19.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS ON THE USE OF TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE BY THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC DURING THE OVERLAND CAMPAIGN

> Everything depends upon a variety of situations, casualties of events, and intermediate occurrences, which no human foresight can positively ascertain, but which may be converted to good purposes by a quick eye, a ready conception, and prompt execution.[1]

Major General Henry W. Halleck

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion on the end state of the Overland Campaign in relation to Grant's intended objective, and addresses some of the factors that contributed to the outcome. A summary of intelligence in the Union Army and the Army of the Potomac follows. The analysis and discussion of tactical intelligence use prefaces the conclusions reached and answers the primary question of the thesis; how did Grant, Meade and the Army of the Potomac use tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign?

End State of the Overland Campaign

The 4 May to 12 June 1864 portion of the campaign marked a period of constant maneuver punctuated by hard fighting that resulted in indecisive battles with high casualties for the Army of the Potomac. The bravery and determination of the Army of the Potomac's soldiers, as well as the exceptional leadership displayed by most of the commanders, served Meade and Grant well. Furthermore, tactical intelligence and analysis contributed to potential windows of opportunity for victory. Unfortunately, slow

or incapable leaders within and external to the Army of the Potomac inhibited success and possible victory several times during the campaign.

The Army of the Potomac was the decisive operation for Grant's Union Army strategy against the Confederacy. It relied upon the supporting efforts of Sigel in the Shenandoah and Butler's Army of the James. Their ability to occupy the Confederate forces they faced would directly contribute to the Army of the Potomac's ability to move rapidly and react quickly to Lees' un-reinforced Army of Northern Virginia. Had either Sigel or Butler been at least partially successful, the gains made by the Army of Potomac at Spotsylvania Court House, which severely depleted Lee's army, might have resulted in success by summer's end. Unfortunately, neither Sigel nor Burnside produced the desired effect and Lee received reinforcements at the North Anna, which negated the immediate effects of attrition inflicted by the Army of the Potomac.

Grant did not achieve success at either the tactical or the operational level in the Overland Campaign. Though not defeated in battle, he failed in his operational objective to defeat Lee in the field. Strategically, however, Grant succeeded, though he did not obtain victory until the following spring. The one sure tactical victory during the Overland Campaign happened at Yellow Tavern where Sheridan soundly defeated Stuart, who later died of wounds received during the battle. This is significant because it not only ended the superiority of the Confederate cavalry; it also diminished Lee's ability to conduct reconnaissance and raids against the Army of the Potomac.

Grant, however, achieved success by his ability to continue the operational maneuver of the Army of the Potomac repeatedly around Lee's right and deeper into Virginia. Grant, himself, considered this a success despite the indecisive results of the

battles fought.[2] In addition to the historical categorization of the Overland Campaign as one of attrition, Grant succeeded in waging a psychological operation against the Confederacy. Unlike previous Army of the Potomac commanders, Grant kept going after each battle, never stopped and never retreated, which produced a severe psychological effect in addition to the physical depletion of Lee's army.

Unfortunately for Grant, Lee never played into his intent to catch him in the open. Instead, Lee made few and limited attacks against Grant, and only in situations and terrain where Grant could not turn the action around. Lee used the terrain to his full advantage and managed to frustrate Grant's attempts to catch him in the open by occupying prepared or easily assumed defensive positions. Though combat ensued, Grant knew when it was no longer feasible to pursue offensive operations, with the exception of Cold Harbor, and moved on past Lee's right and further south.

During the battles at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House, the Army of the Potomac set the conditions and had the opportunity to decisively defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. Unfortunately, the slow and incompetent Burnside, and the over-methodical Warren prevented the Army of the Potomac from maximizing its combat power at the decisive point during key assaults. The lack of tactical and operational success for the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign stems more from the poor or apprehensive leadership on Burnside and Warren's part then it does on the limited intelligence on Lee's location and disposition.

Summary of Intelligence

The US Army before the Civil War did not incorporate any intelligence functions at any level. As a result, the Union Army entered the Civil War without them. The lack of

any doctrinal or instructional publications exacerbated the problem and left field commanders without guidance on how to establish such functions for themselves. Out of necessity, commanders throughout the Union Army developed and implemented their own intelligence functions. The two commanders most noted for their efforts were McClellan and Hooker who each commanded the Army of the Potomac.

Though McClellan used Pinkerton's civilian detective service, which proved of no benefit, it was the first intelligence organization in the history of the Army. Hooker, however, directed the creation of what became the first all-source intelligence organization in the Army, incorporated under his Provost Marshal General. Organized, administered, and led by Sharpe, the BMI grew into an organization that could provide accurate intelligence about the enemy. Unfortunately, Hooker chose to ignore and disregard their efforts.

Under Hooker's replacement, the BMI fared no better as Meade injected himself into the process established by Sharpe and essentially subverted the BMI's capabilities. This caused the BMI to exist primarily as an intelligence unit, which no longer conducted all-source analysis and only provided IPW and its organic scout reports. This remained the case as Grant co-located his field headquarters with the Army of the Potomac and initiated the Overland Campaign. Though BMI provided intelligence for planning and preparation, it contributed minimally during the campaign. Not until July of 1864, when an angry Meade threatened to disband the BMI, did Sharpe set up a desk in Grant's headquarters and began again to perform intelligence collection and analysis as he once had.[3]

Even with BMI's minimal intelligence contribution, the Army of the Potomac still made use of HUMINT, SIGINT, and OSINT at the tactical level. OSINT only served to help fill gaps, but nonetheless remained a relied upon source. Because of the thickly vegetated and flat terrain of the campaign's area of operations, the signal soldiers of the Army of the Potomac provided minimal SIGINT with only a few Confederate flag communication intercepts, which they easily deciphered. Instead, they contributed more to the HUMINT effort as they assumed the duties of scouts in addition to BMI's.

HUMINT emerged as the predominate form of tactical intelligence for the Army of the Potomac. Its chief methods included reconnaissance, surveillance, IPW reports and combat information. The primary method of intelligence gathering was offensive reconnaissance, performed by regiments and brigades, which produced both combat information and prisoners for interrogation.

The cavalry, however, was not a significant contributor since it performed a variety of missions instead of reconnaissance. The cavalry guarded the logistics trains, conducted counter-cavalry and counter-reconnaissance against the Confederates, or guarded the flanks of the Army of the Potomac. Furthermore, Sheridan took his cavalry on the raid to Richmond and left only one of his three divisions to perform all the said roles. Though Burnside's Ninth Corps had cavalry, they complimented the division of infantry that protected the Army of the Potomac's enormous logistics trains. This permitted the remaining division of Sheridan's cavalry to concentrate on the other cavalry missions, but not reconnaissance. Not until the Army of the Potomac disengaged from North Anna did Sheridan's cavalry begin to assume any type of reconnaissance role. Even then, it too performed offensive reconnaissance along with the infantry corps.

Analysis of Tactical Intelligence Use

In the book *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare*, Edward Hagerman provided an assessment of Grant's methodology during the Overland Campaign.

> Grant did not have a systematic tactical outlook, but rather acted according to an appraisal of each situation as it arose, blending an erratic mixture of common sense about the conditions of warfare with a predisposition arguably to the warrior's test of battle.[4]

Furthermore, *The Reader's Companion to Military History* provides a discussion on the use of intelligence and states that "intelligence affects the defense more than the offense."[5] The authors based this characterization on Clausewitz and his comparison of the offense and the defense. Specifically, they use Clausewitz's statement that the defense is a "blow" that can be anticipated, and that the offense is "complete in itself" and does not need intelligence for its conduct.

Hagerman's assessment, combined with this historical characterization of intelligence, provides a good representation of how Grant conducted the Overland Campaign. It shows Grant's application of common sense without being a student of military thought in how he used intelligence to assist in making an "appraisal" of each tactical situation.

Based on Grant's concept of operations, objective, and envisioned end state, the planning and pre-movement stages of the Overland Campaign required the most intelligence. This was the one time when a clear delineation between operational and tactical level intelligence was evident. Satisfied that Lee's army was not about to attempt its own offensive, and that it remained along the Rapidan with Longstreet at Gordonsville, Grant issued his final orders to initiate the Overland Campaign.

Intelligence also helped Grant decide to go by Lee's right across the Rapidan and through the Wilderness with the intent to reach open ground and fight Lee's army there.

As Grant maneuvered the Army of the Potomac, his chief intelligence requirements focused on knowing if Lee was trying to turn his flank, and that his lines of communication to his logistics bases remained open. To answer these two questions, Grant used a blurring of tactical and operational-level intelligence. Telegrams and other reports from Washington, Fredericksburg, as well as the trail elements of the Army of the Potomac kept him informed about his lines of communications, which remained relatively secure. These same types of reports, combined with at least one division of Sheridan's cavalry that guarded the flanks, kept Grant informed about any Confederate effort to turn his flank.

Otherwise, Grant only needed to know the general location and disposition of the Army of Northern Virginia. He knew that as long as he held the initiative through maneuver, he had both the numbers and the ability to defeat Lee outside of any entrenchments north of Richmond.

Therefore, the only intelligence Grant needed was when the Army of the Potomac was in contact with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. This generally involved learning the extent of Lee's lines, how he had arrayed them, and what potential or actual vulnerabilities existed. Otherwise, when Grant maneuvered the Army of the Potomac between battles, he wanted Lee to attack because he knew that in the open a weighted counter-attack by the Army of the Potomac would crush Lee.

The decisions made during each battle of the Overland Campaign resulted more from combat information than intelligence. The little true intelligence used resulted from

offensive reconnaissance, which by its nature was actually a directed form of combat information. Though not intended as such, the Battle of the Wilderness resulted as a movement to contact. As the battle progressed and both sides established entrenchments and breastworks, the knowledge gained of Lee's disposition came from combat information.

Grant and Meade did not have a firm fix on Lee's disposition and arrayal until the final day of the battle. As a result, several staff and subordinate commanders worried that Lee might succeed in a flank or rear attack. In one instance, when this seemed possible, Grant told a subordinate general officer,

> Oh, I am heartily tired of hearing about what Lee is going to do. Some of you always seem to think he is suddenly going to turn a double somersault, and land in our rear and on both our flanks at the same time. Go back to your command, and try to think what we are going to do ourselves, instead of what Lee is going to do.[6]

This memorable statement not only described Grant's idea and priority about intelligence during the battle, but the overall campaign as well.

The peak of intelligence, collected by reconnaissance, observation, and IPW occurred at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House. Terrain had hindered intelligence collection at the Wilderness, and though terrain still hampered R&S at Spotsylvania, it occurred in a deliberate manner. By repeated and nearly constant offensive reconnaissance and surveillance, combined with signal unit and engineer reconnaissance, the Army of the Potomac felt out the Confederate lines and found vulnerable points to attack. On at least two separate occasions, Grant and Meade used this intelligence and had the opportunity to turn initial assault success into victory, but became instances when subordinate commanders failed, and so did the assaults.

Where pickets and skirmishers pressed to find the disposition and weaknesses in Lee's lines at Spotsylvania, this did not occur at Cold Harbor. There are several reasons why this probably did not happen despite the indicators in the days preceding the battle. Chief among these is terrain, a near constant throughout the Overland Campaign. In addition, the Army of the Potomac perceived a threat to its line of communication to White House landing on the Pamunkey River. This produced the hastened requirement to attack at Cold Harbor. Though the Army of the Potomac had excellent logistics, an additional factor of consideration is the exhaustion of the officers, non-commissioned officers, and troops. These factors, combined with the belief that the Army of Northern Virginia was near its end, all contributed to the lack of pre-assault offensive reconnaissance as conducted at Spotsylvania.

Conclusions on Tactical Intelligence Use

Ultimately, the two chief sources of tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign resulted from offensive reconnaissance and IPW reports. Even though the use of these two methods seems inadequate when the possibilities such as the BMI are considered, they proved sufficient for what Grant needed tactically. Operationally, Grant appeared to need only a minimal amount of intelligence because he wanted Lee to attack him in the open.

The use of combat information and intelligence derived from offensive reconnaissance served as viable methods as long as the corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac had the initiative and agility to use them. However, these methods did not facilitate in depth planning and preparation before an engagement, aside from the

identification of a weak point. They proved most beneficial at the tactical level, and only just before the assault.

Grant appeared to have a strong belief in the merits of reconnaissance, regardless of the method used. Unfortunately, it does not seem that all the corps commanders in the Army of the Potomac shared Grant's emphasis equally. For some, such as Burnside, Grant had to direct him to conduct reconnaissance. For others, like Hancock, they knew and understood the importance of reconnaissance and conveyed this to their division and brigade commanders.[7]

Ultimately, offensive reconnaissance became the predominate method to not only find the enemy, but once found, ascertain strength, disposition, and vulnerabilities for exploitation. The infantry, not the cavalry, accomplished this. Grant seems to have made a deliberate decision, though Sheridan was a confident and competent leader, to not use cavalry in a reconnaissance and scouting role. Instead, Sheridan's ability to raid and cause havoc, as Stuart had once done to the Union Army, far outweighed the need for cavalry reconnaissance. Grant understood that inflicting damage by destroying scarce and irreplaceable resources served his operational objectives more than having intelligence provided by the cavalry, which he did not need anyway.

This also provides insight into why Grant did not use the BMI during the Overland Campaign. Meade contributed to this when he marginalized the BMI after Gettysburg. Throughout Meade's time in command, up to and including the Overland Campaign, he never placed any emphasis on the BMI. Thus, in addition to Grant's few intelligence requirements, he too probably felt that the BMI had nothing significant to contribute.

So, how did Grant, Meade and the Army of the Potomac use tactical intelligence during the Overland Campaign? They used tactical intelligence primarily during the battles, with Spotsylvania Court House as the pinnacle. Even then, the method of offensive reconnaissance only provided intelligence to identify the intended point of penetration for an assault, and did not encompass much more than that. IPW, the other chief contributor of tactical intelligence, provided limited if applicable intelligence for assault purposes. It did help facilitate the creation and maintenance of order of battle charts. Though nominally useful in the tactical situation, IPW reports contributed more to the operational awareness of what Confederate units were or were not in the fight, which is an example of the blurring between tactical and operational-level intelligence.

Though not specifically used for the operational maneuver of the Army of the Potomac, tactical intelligence helped facilitate movement. Here, intelligence focused more on the lay of the land and the routes used by the Army of the Potomac, but with the enemy in mind. Engineers, scouts, refugees and contrabands served as the primary intelligence sources for the Army of the Potomac as it pushed deeper into Virginia where the on hand maps became inadequate. These sources also provided a limited degree of situational awareness as to where Lee and the Army of the Northern Virginia were. However, as previously discussed, as long as Grant knew that Lee was not flanking him and that his lines of communication remained open, he only required a general awareness.

Conclusion

The use of intelligence by Grant, Meade and the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign gives credence to the contemporary analysis that "more intelligence

case histories consist of defenses than of attacks."[8] As a specific Overland Campaign example, the battle of Spotsylvania Court House for the Army of the Potomac was essentially a defense that conducted a series of offensive assaults against the Confederate entrenchments. Additionally, the battle did not encompass offensive maneuver that characterizes an attack. In further support of this analysis, the Overland Campaign itself was an attack into Virginia accomplished through operational maneuver.

The tactical intelligence used by Grant and Meade to fight the Army of the Potomac during the Overland Campaign might have contributed to tactical and operational success if the corps commanders had responded more rapidly and with vigor. Conversely, it did not contribute to any battlefield defeats. The Union losses at Cold Harbor are more a result of the failure to apply intelligence than to an intelligence failure that consisted of wrong or faulty information.

As Civil War intelligence historian Edwin C. Fishel wrote, "A simple equation between intelligence success and battlefield success cannot be made."[9] Furthermore, "And as good intelligence did not insure correct decisions, erroneous intelligence did not necessarily prevent them."[10] This is much the case where intelligence, Meade, Grant, and the Overland Campaign are concerned.

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[1]Halleck, *Elements of Military Art and Science*, 251.

[2]Feis, *Grant's Secret Service*, 207.

[3]Sparks, *Inside Lincoln's Army*, 393; Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union*, 547-548.

[4]Hagerman, *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare*, 264.

[5]Cowley and Parker, *The Reader's Companion to Military History*, 226.

[6]Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 70.

[7]US War Department, *Official Records*, Part 1, 1st ser., vol. 36, 329.

[8]Cowley and Parker, *The Reader's Companion to Military History*, 226.

[9]Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union*, 4.

[10]Ibid.

GLOSSARY

Analysis. The process of fusing different pieces of information and intelligence into one assessment that contributes to an overall understanding of the enemy.

Aide de camp. A member of the headquarters staff that is a personal staff officer assigned to assist a general officer.

Assault. To close with the enemy in a short, violent, but well-ordered attack against a local objective, such as a gun emplacement, breast works, or entrenchments.

Attack. A form of offensive operation characterized by a coordinated movement.

Collection. The process of obtaining information in any manner, which includes direct observation, the interception of messages, prisoner interrogation, and the reports of friendly adjacent units.

Combat Information. Unevaluated data gathered or provided directly to a commander on the battlefield for immediate use in making decisions or directing action.

Combat Intelligence. Information collected on the enemy's capabilities, intentions, vulnerabilities, and the environment.

Disseminate. The conveyance of information and intelligence collected or received at a centralized point to users and subordinate units in a suitable form.

End State. A set of required conditions that, when achieved, attain the aims set for the campaign.

Enemy Prisoner of War (EPW). Enemy personnel captured during combat operations.

Entrenchment. A defensive position dug into the earth for protection from enemy fire that usually connects to others and creates a line or a series of connected trenches.

Exterior Lines. Operations of a strong and mobile military force converge and provide the opportunity to encircle or annihilate a weaker or less mobile enemy.

Flankers. Mounted or dismounted soldiers used as a security element that are positioned to the flank or outer boundaries of a moving or stationary force to protect it from surprise and provide early warning of an enemy advance.

Fusion. The combining or blending of data and information form various sources into collated information that facilitates the production of intelligence.

Human Intelligence (HUMINT). A category of intelligence derived from information collected and provided by human sources.

Information. Any form of facts or data that serve as input to fusion and analysis, which creates intelligence.

Intelligence. The product of collected, confirmed, evaluated, and correlated information from a variety of sources through fusion and analysis.

Interior Lines. The operations of a military force that diverge from a central point, which allows closely situated friendly forces that are potentially weaker, to mass combat power against a portion of the enemy force by shifting resources more rapidly than the enemy.

Interrogation of Prisoners of War (IPW). The name of the process used for interrogating enemy prisoners of war to gather HUMINT.

Lines of Communication (LOC). The land and water routes that connect an operating military force with a base of operations or supply and along which military forces and supplies move.

Maneuver. The employment and movement of forces on the battlefield used to gain potential advantage from which to destroy or threaten destruction of the enemy to accomplish the mission or achieve an objective.

March Column. A group of two to five elements using the same route for a single movement, organized under a single commander for planning, regulating, and controlling.

Military Intelligence. See "combat intelligence." Information and knowledge about an adversary obtained through observation, investigation, analysis, or understanding.

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). Intelligence gathered from sources and information available to the public such as books, newspapers, speeches and the like.

Operational Intelligence. Intelligence that is required for planning and conducting campaigns and major operations to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters or areas of operation.

Operational Maneuver. See "maneuver." The processes of carrying on combat, including movement, supply, attack, defense, and maneuvers needed to gain the objectives of a campaign.

Operations Security (OPSEC). Actions employed by a military force to prevent the enemy from gaining knowledge about the conduct of friendly operations.

Order of Battle. The identification, strength, command structure, and disposition of the personnel, units, and equipment of any military force.

Patrol. A detachment of soldiers sent out for the purpose of gathering information or carrying out a destructive, harassing, mopping-up, or security mission.

Picket. The Civil War name and practice equivalent to the modern Army listening post-observation post; they give warning of the approach or retreat of the enemy, or any information about enemy movements and disposition.

Reconnaissance. A mission conducted to obtain information about the activities and resources of an enemy, or to secure data concerning geographic characteristics of a particular area.

Reconnaissance and Surveillance (R&S). See "reconnaissance" and "surveillance." A mission conducted to gain knowledge about the enemy by using surveillance through the performance of reconnaissance.

Signals Intelligence (SIGINT). Intelligence derived from the interception of enemy signal communications.

Strategic Intelligence. Intelligence that is required for the formulation of military strategy, policy, and plans and operations at national and theater levels.

Surveillance. The practice of observing specified areas, places, persons, or things by visual or aural means.

Tactical Intelligence. Intelligence that is required for planning the ordered arrangement and maneuver of combat units for the conduct of battles and engagements to accomplish military objectives.

Terrain. A geographic area that includes both natural and manmade features combined with other relevant factors such as vegetation and contour.

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